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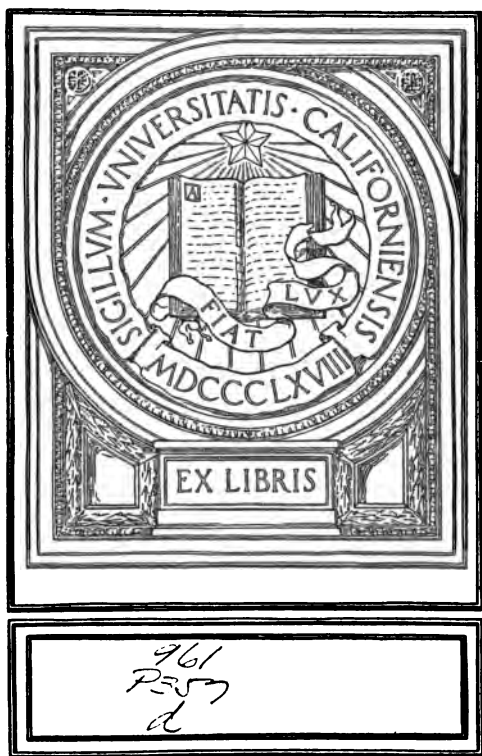
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THE DARLINGTONS



ELMORE
ELLIOTT
PEAKE



The Darlings

The Darlings

By

Elmore Elliott Peake
||

THE
DARLINGS

New York

McClure, Phillips & Co.

1900

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First impression, September, 1900

Second impression, October, 1900

Third impression, November, 1900

TO THE
LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS

MANHATTAN PRESS

TO MY MOTHER

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The Darlings



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CHAPTER I

THE PENALTY OF ORATORY

"THE wealth, beauty, and fashion of Ashboro" — to quote from the *Ashboro Intelligencer* of the following week — were assembled in the new general-office building of the High Point, Rankelman, Ashboro, and Southern Railroad. The tessellated ground-floor, set apart for station purposes, but not yet cut up into waiting-rooms, ticket-office, and baggage-room, presented a long, clean sweep from one end of the building to the other. Here the guests came to a comparative rest after flocking through the general offices upstairs, which had been thrown open to the public through the courtesy of President Darlington. These rooms were mostly bare as yet, but the potentialities stored up in them as the heart of the H. P., R., A., and S. system, limited to one hundred and two miles though that system was, made them interesting. In the train-despatcher's office, however, the telegraph instruments were already busily clicking, and the three or four young operators, hedged off by a neat railing from the curious throng, calmly smoked their cob pipes as they fingered their keys.

The Darlington

By eight o'clock the ground-floor was full of people — altogether too full for dancing, some of the young women anxiously observed. A temporary platform had been erected at one end of the room. One side of this was occupied by the Ashboro band; the other, by a group of sedate, prosperous-looking, middle-aged men, mostly portly and mostly bald. This group comprised the president and the directors of the road, the Mayor and the common council of Ashboro, and a few other prominent citizens.

After a rattling number by the band, a brief address by the Mayor, and another rattling number by the band, a neatly dressed, handsome man, with a strikingly firm and graceful carriage, side whiskers, and keen black eyes, — they were really brown, — advanced to the front of the platform, with one hand hanging easily by the thumb from his vest pocket. He might have been fifty or more, but there was a delusively youthful air about his pleasant face, well-groomed person, and scrupulous attire. His appearance created a storm of applause, and a stranger might readily have guessed that the speaker was C. A. Darlington, president of the H. P., R., A., and S. Railroad.

"Friends and fellow-citizens," he began, in a voice not very loud or very clear, but very convincing, "I am going to take you all into my confidence to-night. I believe you are worthy of it. I believe the public is generally worthy of confidence; I believe it can be trusted. And as this railroad is run in the interests of all you people (laughter), I don't see why you should n't know some things. That is why I invited you all here to-night — not simply to eat and dance and have a good time. But I am not going to talk long, and you

girls who are tapping the floor with your feet can soon throw yourselves into the arms of Terpsichore."

After a pause, in which his face dropped some of its levity, though his eyes never ceased their twinkling, he continued: "You all know what your town was before I built this road, ten years ago. You all know what any town is, in this day and age, without a railroad. It's like a man who can't read or write. No matter what its natural advantages are, without a railroad they all go for nothing. But I am not going to say that I built this road out of philanthropy. I built it to make money. *I have made money; I expect to make more.* No man in this town ever saw me make a poor mouth, or heard me complain of hard times. I don't do it. ~~But I believe I can truthfully say that you people have shared in that prosperity. Every year we have given you better service than the year before, and nearly every year there has been some reduction in freight rates. I think you will all admit that.~~" He turned and looked at the group on the platform, and the Mayor nodded his head affirmatively. "Yet there has been some criticism. People have called it a family affair. They say that I am the president, and my son the traffic-manager, and my daughter the auditor and comptroller. Well, so we are; but if I thought that anybody else could do the work of my son and daughter better than they do it, for the same money, I'd turn them off to-morrow."

This raised another laugh, followed by a turning of heads and craning of necks. Evidently the traffic-manager and the fair auditor were in the crowd.

"I see some of you don't believe that," continued the speaker, with his shrewd sparkle; "but I would. I am able to do it. Most of you know that I hold a

controlling interest in the stock of the H. P., R., A., and S. Railroad. I can make or unmake any official. But ask any of these gentlemen here who hold stock if they want to sell. If they do want to sell, ask them how much higher their figure is than what they bought at. Another thing. You have only one railroad, which some people claim is as bad as a man's having only one leg. Sometimes it is, I'll admit. But we can't help that ; we can't build another railroad for you ; and if we did, you would be just as badly off as you are now. But we can do this : we can make another railroad unnecessary, and we will. We want to give you just as good service as though there were fifty competing lines running into Ashboro. If your freight does n't come through on time, let us know ; let the traffic-manager know ; and if he doesn't give you satisfaction, let *me* know. I'm always in my office. If our conductors are not polite, or if our engineers don't haul you as fast as you want to go, go to the ticket-office and get your money back. (More laughter.) If the ticket-agent gives it back, you can have it.

"One word about this building. It was built by Ashboro contractors and Ashboro labor, as far as possible. Not a dollar went out of town that I could keep in. There is not another city of six thousand inhabitants in the United States that has such a station as you are going to have. Why, you can entertain your city friends in these waiting-rooms when they are done. Some of the stockholders thought such a station was too good for you ; but I told them that I did n't think anything on earth was too good for the people of Ashboro, and they soon saw it in that light, too."

This sly reference to the notorious manner in which

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he had ridden rough-shod over the minority of the stockholders, in the matter of expenditures on the new building, produced a broad smile, participated in by the stockholders themselves.

"As a matter of fact, though," the president continued, "it *is* a little finer than the Ashboro business will warrant, and High Point and Rankelman are both crying now for new stations. I suppose they will have to have them some day. But I don't think they will ever get one like this. That's all I have to say, I believe; and I hope you will go ahead now and enjoy yourselves. Some of us old fellows who can't drink coffee after twelve o'clock noon and sleep any that night will pull out early; but you young ones that want more room to dance in won't complain about that. The band here is engaged till sunrise, if you want it that long; and if you want it longer than that, come up to the house and wake me up."

The president made a short bow, and turned away, his thumb still in his vest pocket. Three cheers were proposed by the Mayor, and given with a good will. Then some one called out, "Traffic-manager!" and three cheers were given for him. They were acknowledged from the floor by a smooth-faced, clean-looking, stylish young fellow, whose blue eyes and light hair would scarcely have marked him as a son of the president. He arose with a little self-consciousness, bowed gravely, and sat down again.

"Auditor! Auditor!" next called a voice. Three more cheers, fairly deafening, rent the air. The auditor, a young woman with the fair hair of a Swedish princess, arose with a laugh, bowed gracefully, and sank out of sight again.

"Speech! Speech!" shouted some one, and instantly the whole assembly took up the cry. The laughter died out of the auditor's eyes, and she shot a quick, startled glance at her companion.

"You will have to!" said the other, grimly.

For an instant the auditor dropped her steady gray eyes to the floor, as if trying to think of something to say. For an instant longer she bit her under lip, and then she promptly rose, her hands folded simply before her, her cheeks of a slightly heightened color.

"Platform! Platform!" cried some insatiable one, and the thoughtless crowd echoed the request. The victim, courageously accepting the inevitable, extricated herself from the perfumed, rustling mesh around her by a sinuous turn or two of her supple figure, and firmly marched toward the platform down the aisle that opened up for her.

She could not have been more than twenty-two, but something about her subtly suggested power. Her beautiful head, weighted with its mass of tawny hair, was inclined modestly forward; but one could not escape the thought that it could lift high on occasion. Her eyes were directed straight ahead in a thoroughly businesslike, impersonal way, yet in their depths there lurked an amused, half-quizzical light, as if she had views of her own about such an honor as this. Her square chin denoted determination, but it at the same time guaranteed the perpetual absence of peevishness, while a womanly sweetness and charity hovered around her lips. Moreover, her presence breathed life and health. As she threaded the narrow, crooked passage, there was a loveliness, a good-fellowship, in the very sinuosity of her movements; and dignified, even

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queenly, as was her bearing, still there escaped from her a hint of suppressed animal spirits.

The steps to the platform were blocked with men and boys, five rows deep, who slowly loosened up to make way for Miss Darlington. But she did not wait. She whispered something in one man's ear, and he quickly rose and placed his chair close to the platform. Gathering her skirts in her hand with a swift, sweeping motion, she stepped lightly on to the chair, and thence to the platform, with a grace and modesty unimpeachable. She faced the audience as coolly as her father had faced it, save for a little stiffness around the lips, and a very little defiance in her eyes, which may have sprung from fright.

"My friends," she began, in a clear, boyish tenor that penetrated to the farthest corner of the big room, "I am not an orator." She paused. Simple and conventional as were the words, there were a sturdiness and an honesty in her tones that instantly captivated the fancy of her audience. Doubtless, also, the courage required of a woman to suddenly face such an assemblage with tranquillity won the sympathy and admiration of more than one. As a consequence, when the girl leaned slightly forward, before resuming, with a half confidential air, which was as eloquent as it was unstudied, her hearers sympathetically met her half-way, as it were, by their perfect silence.

"I don't know that I have anything to say," she continued, simply, but with dignity, "except to thank you for this honor, and to say that I am glad to see so many of you here to-night in response to our public invitation. It is a rather delicate subject to touch upon, but your presence seems to me to indicate that there is not

very much hard feeling, in spite of what has been sometimes said, between the railroad and the people. I am sure that we, the officials of the road, have never intentionally injured any one of you ; and I don't believe that many of you have ever intentionally injured us — except me, when you made me get up here to-night to speak.

“ My father has said about all there is to say from the railroad's point of view — and of course that is my point of view,” she added, smiling. “ Yet not exclusively so, I trust. It is quite necessary for us to take a look at things now and then from other people's point of view. My father told the simple truth when he said that the railroad had been run in the interests of the people, for their interests are ours. We always try to remember that — not from philanthropic motives, as my father told you, but as a business policy.

“ I don't know what more I can say. Personally, I shall always try to be pleasant with any of you who may have business with me ; and if I receive any vouchers for a refund of ticket money, on account of conductors' ill behavior or slow trains, as my father hinted, I shall promptly O. K. them. I shall be especially guarded in my official behavior now that I have learned that the axe of discharge is hanging over my head the same as over any other employé's. Up to ten minutes ago I had supposed that I had wheedled my father into giving me my position. It seems that I was mistaken. But if I should unwittingly offend the president, and thus jeopardize my position, I herewith bespeak in my behalf the good offices of the other stockholders of the road and the public in general. In return I shall be happy to do everything in my power, officially and per-

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sonally, for your welfare and — and happiness.” For a moment she stood silent, in just the least embarrassment, though her clear blue eyes never faltered. Then she added, with a slight flush, as if conscious of an anticlimax in her ending, “I don’t know that I can close with a more pleasing promise than that, and I wish you all enjoyment during the rest of the evening.” She retreated a step, and bowed low; whereupon the assembly responded with long applause.

When Carol Darlington entered her room, about two o’clock in the morning, she found her younger sister, Ruth, there, swathed in a flannel robe and buried in the depths of a big leather chair before the grate fire, with a book in her hand.

“Go to bed, Babe,” said Carol, with the authority of a five years’ seniority. She threw her long tan coat across a chair, and mechanically pressed her heavy coils of hair up from her neck, after which she stood warming her hands.

“I’m not sleepy. Let me stay until you undress,” answered Ruth, with the air of one announcing her intentions rather than begging a favor. “Your speech was lovely, sis.”

“Get out!” said Carol, without lifting her eyes.

“I heard lots of compliments,” continued Ruth, enthusiastically. “Old man Taylor said that, if his daughters could speak like that off-hand, he’d send them off to college to-morrow.”

“The old miser!” said Carol, scornfully.

“Well, they *are* pluggy,” ventured Ruth, in the old man’s defence.

“Pluggy!” Carol lifted her eyes admonishingly.

The Darlings

"Scrubby," corrected Ruth.

"So is their father — and their mother."

"Were n't you scared?" asked the other, after a pause.

"Stiff," said Carol.

"You did n't look it," declared Ruth, admiringly.

"Did n't I?" asked Carol, in a tone which implied that she was very well aware of that fact.

Ruth stole a wondering glance at her sister's haughty profile. Something had evidently gone wrong at the ball. Carol's lips were very straight now, without that lovable droop; her chin was set hard, and the blue eyes had turned to gray. Ruth was mightily curious, but the most she dared do was to prolong the conversation in the hope that Carol might see fit to confess. "Papa was a regular whale, was n't he?" she exclaimed, as though the thought had just struck her.

Carol's eyes again flashed reproof at this bit of slang, and then she burst into a laugh. "Papa is a first-class hypocrite," said she. "He spread around more honey there to-night than he has handled in ten years before. You can imagine it was n't any fun for him. He would sooner have been whipped." She sank down on the arm of the chair, and shook with laughter.

"*Did n't* he spread it on thick?" cried Ruth.

"And so sweet and smiling that sugar would n't have melted in his mouth," added Carol, husky from mirth.

"And never took his thumb out of his vest pocket the whole time!" shrieked Ruth.

"As though he was afraid somebody might steal his watch!"

Convulsed with laughter, Carol let herself sink down

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on top of Ruth, threatening that young lady, who was also convulsed, with suffocation.

"And not—not ten minutes after—after he had said this was the happiest hour of his life—" gasped Ruth.

"Oh, he did n't say *that*!" whimpered Carol, weakly.

"—I heard him tell old man Briggs that he—that he—that he—could n't—"

"Well, choke!" said Carol, as Ruth gave alarming evidence of doing that thing.

"—that he could n't get out of that *confounded hubbub* too quick!"

For a moment perfect silence reigned, — the delusive silence that interlards a very young baby's blasts of temper, when breath is at a premium. The mass of hair and dress-stuff in the big chair shook for a few seconds, the two heads rolled around helplessly, and then shriek after shriek of hysterical laughter filled the room.

"We'll wake the house," said Carol, sobering up. She rose, and pressed her aching sides. "You *must* go to bed."

"All right," said Ruth, promptly jumping up, as though she knew just how far she could safely resist her sister's will. "Say, what did you think of Rose Blumenthal's costume?" she asked.

It was a shrewd guess. Carol stopped in the middle of unbinding her hair, and looked haughty again. "I thought it was downright vulgar," said she, emphatically. "I would n't go to the most exclusive ball ever given in *this* town in such a gown. People don't wear them here. And to go down there to that public affair, where every Tom, Dick, and Harry could come, in

that costume, I think, was simply abominable. I think Lucy was a little ashamed of her city friend, for once. And then Rose had the effrontery to tell me that so many long sleeves and high necks reminded her of her school-girl days. I had a notion to tell her that they reminded me of a saving sense of propriety."

"I suppose she said that just to let herself down easily," said Ruth, shrewdly. "She must have felt out of place."

"I should think so."

"What did Cash Winter say about her?"

"He did n't say anything," answered Carol. "Why should he?"

"He danced with her three times," said Ruth, vaguely.

"That was a very good reason why he should not say anything. He danced three times with me, but I hope he did n't go off and talk about me."

"He could n't. He did, though," she added, brightly. Her sister wilfully refused to ask what had been said, upon which Ruth continued, "He told me you were the best dancer on the floor."

"Knowing, very likely, that you would come straight to me with it," said Carol, carelessly, but softening.

"That's mean," said Ruth, stoutly. "And he's so good to you."

"Well, if it's mean, I take it back. It *is* mean. Cash is not a flatterer. Trot, now! I am deathly tired. Dancing is beginning to pall on me."

CHAPTER II

AN UNCANONICAL CONFESSOR

CAROL did not go to bed at once, in spite of her fatigue. The big chair and the ruddy glow of the cannel-coal fire tempted her ; and slipping into a dressing-gown, she sat down for a minute, late as it was. She thought of their new building, and wondered if, after all, as some of the stockholders held, it was n't too good for the business ; she wondered if it was not, as had been charged, a pet project of her father's. She smiled as she called to mind her father's caustic denunciation of the stockholders' penny-wise-pound-foolish policy, but wondered if he had not, in his ambition, somewhat deceived himself. Still, he ought to know. He had had to do with railroads all his life. She wondered next just how she should arrange her new office. There should be nothing womanish about it, she resolved. It should be just as business-like as any man would have had it. A little later, following out her career, she was picturing herself a gray-haired woman, the president of the road. Her father would be very proud of her, and she smiled until she recalled that he would very likely be dead by that time. This brought her back to the present.

Miss Blumenthal's daring costume next occupied her mind. The dark-haired young Jewess had certainly

looked magnificent. Her arms and neck were superb ; nobody could deny that. Cash Winter *had* said something about the young woman, indirectly. As he passed Carol on the floor he had made some joking remark about the children of Israel. The import of it she did not quite catch, and for reasons of her own she did not care to ask him to repeat it, though he had walked home with her ; but she had taken his words to be quasi-complimentary. She wondered if he had failed to detect the incongruity of the young Jewess's costume. Men, she knew, were often incredibly insensible to such things. After a moment, she slowly pushed her loose sleeve up toward her shoulder, baring her own firm, white arm. She looked a moment, and then pulled the sleeve down again, rather quickly, and with a slight flush. She had bared that arm many a time in ball-rooms, before scores of people, without flushing ; but it had not been then with the thought of rivaling another's charms.

After she got to bed, the sandman held aloof. She got to thinking about her brother Herbert, and wondering where he could be, for he had left the ball before herself. He had a habit of lingering at Elsie Clifford's house, but he could hardly be doing that now, at such an hour. Then she was dimly conscious of hearing the front door softly close. She had half forgotten it, when there came a tap on her door.

"What is it?" she asked, softly, knowing it must be her brother.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Yes."

He slipped in, and closed the door gently. "Asleep?" he asked.

"Yes," said she, playfully.

"I want to talk to you awhile," said he, advancing to the side of the bed. "I could n't sleep now if I went to bed."

"If *you* can't sleep, by all means work off your insomnia in here," said she, with her light mockery.

"Don't you want to listen?" he asked, halting in the dull light of the fire, with his hand on the electric bulb.

"Of course, foolishness," she answered, and he snapped on the light, revealing his sister buried to the throat in the bed-clothes. With her head snuggled into a nest in the pillow, and the loose short hairs around her ears floating down over her cheek, she looked up at him with a cozy gleam in her eyes. His face, as the lamp-light fell on it, showed flushed and excited; and though he looked very fine and handsome, Carol's expression changed.

"Bert, you have n't been — down town?" she asked, soberly.

"No, no," said he, hastily.

"Forgive me, brother," she said. "But where on earth *have* you been? You have n't been keeping that girl up till this hour?" she asked, severely.

"Yes, I have," he answered, without the least remorse.

"O woman! Surely thou art made of the long-suffering stuff that angels are!" she declaimed. "Bert Darlington, you are a monster! Do you know what time her grandfather insists on having breakfast? Six-thirty! Three and a half hours hence! Elsie is too easy. She ought to have dismissed you at the door."

"Carol," said Bert, abruptly, "Elsie has promised to become my wife!"

He looked at his sister with an expression that was

almost appealing in its intensity. She took the matter more coolly, and her blue eyes, though a little rounder now, shone up from the pillow with the tranquillity of twin stars. Then she freed her arms from the covers, and held out both hands to Herbert with a smile.

"I wish you both, brother, all the happiness in the world."

"Are you surprised?" he asked, soberly.

"Why should I be surprised?" she asked back, with a vein of subtle tenderness in her voice. "I think you the best man in the world, and Elsie the best woman. Besides," she added, with her bantering smile, "a woman would promise a man almost anything at three A. M. when she has to get up at six."

Bert smiled a little, but said gravely, "Don't joke, Carol. I'm in no mood for it now."

His sister dropped her lashes thoughtfully, but she still insisted on not taking matters too seriously, and a little shadowy smile still played around the corners of her pretty mouth. Her brother watched her closely, still retaining her hands in his.

"Well, Bert, Elsie will make a sister that I shall never be ashamed of," said Carol, after a moment.

"She will make a sister that you can always be proud of," said Bert, impetuously. "I won't say a word about her nobility — you know how noble she is — but there is n't a girl in this town that could carry herself with more grace in any conceivable situation than Elsie — unless it's yourself. She will be an ornament to any society. Yet she is as domestic and simple-hearted and true as she can be, and that is what counts. And she's as tender and affectionate as a baby." He paused, as if to allow Carol to corroborate these sen-

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timents; but as she said nothing, he added, in a slightly altered tone, "We've decided to keep our engagement a secret for a while."

"Is that the reason you told me?" she asked, looking up with a whimsical glance.

"I could n't help it," he confessed, boyishly. "I had to tell somebody. I could n't have slept a wink to-night if I had n't."

Carol smiled again, perhaps with a trifle of superiority, though Bert was two years her senior, and cast a droll glance at the Japanese clock above the fireplace. "As it is, you will now have time for two or three winks," she said, slyly.

"I will tell her to-morrow that I told you," continued Bert, too full of the subject to heed her joke. "Then I want you to go up there and talk it over with her. A good deal of our happiness depends on you, in some ways, Carol," he added, with the anxious look which had clouded his face several times before. "It is n't going to be all smooth sailing for us. If I were n't" — He broke off abruptly. Whatever was in his mind was evidently also in Carol's. It was also evidently something too obvious for either of them to pretend to overlook; yet Carol would not acknowledge it by meeting his eye just then. "I can't feel that I have done wrong, Carol," he continued, earnestly. "I walked home on air to-night. I never felt so much of a man before as I have since winning her love. I never felt in all my life so good and so strong before; and I thank God for his goodness in giving me such a woman to love, and care for, and live for. I can't fall again, sister," he ran on, with tremulous eagerness. "Something tells me that I can't. It would be too cruel.

But if I do, Carol, — if I ever, by my brutal appetite, bring shame and sorrow on that dear, devoted head, I hope that God will strike me dead."

He was very solemn now, even tragic. His sister, none too easily impressed, looked up at him with glistening eyes.

"I don't myself see how you can ever fall again now, brother," she said in a voice of low, rich melody. "You have so much to live for. And I don't believe you will fall. In spite of all the past, I have faith in you. I believe the turning-point has come. But, brother dear," she added, tightening her grasp upon his hands, "if you think the struggle is over, you will be disappointed. You can't always float with your head in the clouds, as it is now. But you can always be brave and true to yourself — and to her. It is not an impossible thing. Thousands of men do as much every day, and you can. And when you are tempted, as assuredly you will be, you will now have more strength to overcome the temptation."

Bert rose from the bed rather quickly, and with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the floor, paced to and fro for some moments, with a dark, brooding face. Then he sat down again, with a manly smile. "Sis, we won't mar this happy night with such thoughts. We won't cross the bridge until we come to it. I wish you could have seen Elsie to-night when I asked her to marry me. Of course, she had expected it. She knew that I loved her. She must have decided it all in advance. But when I took her hands in mine and asked her to become my wife, she just nodded her head a little, and laid it on my shoulder, and whispered, 'Go home, dear.' Then she began to cry."

Carol had listened with a calm, judicial face, but at this point her eyes, in spite of herself, grew misty ; and when Bert, lifted out of himself, as it were, by her delicate sympathy, added, "Great as it was to me, Carol, what must it have been to her?" the tears fairly trembled on her lashes.

"I don't know, brother," answered Carol, smiling and brushing the drops away, "whether it could be much greater."

"Yes, it could," said Bert, positively. "'Love is of man's life a thing apart ; 't is woman's whole existence.'"

"Some men and some women," said Carol, qualifyingly.

"She's one of them," said Bert. "And I've been thinking, sitting here, that while I, a man, could not go to sleep without telling you all this, she's up there without a soul in all the word to open her heart to."

"She could tell her grandmother, I suppose," said Carol.

"No," said Bert, with some embarrassment. "Our engagement is to be kept a secret for a while from even her."

"Why?" asked Carol, gravely.

"Because old man Clifford has no faith in me," answered Bert, hurriedly.

For a moment Carol's eyes flashed, but as Bert's head drooped in shame and humility, she gave him a loving, sorrowful glance. "You have held out six months now," she said, softly.

"Yes, but we'll wait a little longer," answered Bert, patiently. "I want to win him over if I can. If I can't, I'll take her without his permission. But that's a poor way to start our married life ; and, meanwhile, she would

have to bear the brunt of his displeasure. When we do tell him, we 'll have it fixed so that he can't bother her very long, if he sees fit to try it. But he has been good to her, in his way, and I want his permission if I can get it."

"Yes, that is much better," said Carol, wisely.

Bert smoothed away at the coverlid with his hand, at first preoccupiedly, but finally with as much purpose as though something momentous depended upon his making a good job of it. Evidently something further was on his mind, and Carol watched him curiously. Suddenly he pressed both his hands to his face and exclaimed brokenly, "Carol, she's the dearest, sweetest, noblest woman that ever lived, and I am not fit for her."

"Don't disparage yourself too much," said Carol, with her worldly-wise smoothness, but with a great deal of tenderness in addition. "Elsie is probably doing the same thing this minute, unless she's sound asleep. It's a way right-minded young people have under these circumstances. If you are not fit, make yourself fit. That's what she will do."

"I never saw her look as beautiful as she did to-night," said Bert, after a little, recovering himself. "Do you know, her type of beauty is my ideal."

"Quite likely," said Carol, with a glint of humor. "There are young men, though, who are quite as fond of the blue-eyed, light-haired type."

"You are jealous, sis," said Bert, smiling and kissing her good-night. "Not a word to father or mother or Ruth, yet," he added. He turned out the light, but still lingered, and at the door he asked, with some hesitation, "Carol, is there anything between you and Cash?"

"What's coming now?" she asked, alertly.

"Is there?" he repeated.

"No," she answered.

"Is there likely to be?"

"Forecasting the future is always a delicate task," answered Carol, without the slightest embarrassment in her voice. "But in this case I can do it with the greatest confidence. There is not."

"I am glad of it," said Bert, promptly.

"Why?" she asked tartly.

"Not that I censure you for letting him come here, as a friend, or mean to impugn your taste. Not that he is n't as good as most of the fellows, or better. But, my dear, he is not good enough for you."

"Have you and Elsie been talking this over?" asked Carol, sharply.

"No, on my honor, no," answered Herbert.

"Well, I thank you, brother," said Carol, with mock humility.

"He could never satisfy you, Carol. You would grow tired of him in six months."

"Herbert, I never suspected such penetration in you," she declared, ironically.

"When you marry, you want a mental Samson to keep you straight," added Bert; and Carol fancied he was now smiling.

"Cash could hardly pose as a Samson, I suppose," she answered. "He has n't hair enough, for one thing. Have you any such character in mind for me?"

"No," he laughed, "but I'll keep my eye open."

"Do so," said Carol, sleepily. "Meanwhile, if you have no objection, I'll close mine for an hour or two. Good-night."

CHAPTER III

SOME MUTUAL DIPLOMACY

CAROL got down in the morning a little after half-past eight, the Darlingtons' breakfast hour, and found the others already at table. Her dark woollen gown gave her a rather subdued appearance, yet she showed to better advantage, after her dissipation, than either Ruth or her brother, both of whom looked rather washed out.

"Papa, I congratulate you on your effort last night," said Carol, stopping behind her father's chair. "I wanted to do it last night, only I missed you in the hubbub." Ruth snickered, but the others of course failed to see the point.

"You liked it, did you?" asked her father, laying down his paper. "Your mother thought it was a little egotistical."

"Why, mamma!" exclaimed Carol, laughing. "Just as though papa *could* be."

Mr. Darlington smiled in his shrewd, non-committal way, like a man used to this kind of thing, and seemed to enjoy it. Mrs. Darlington, a robust, healthy-looking woman, who had by no means relinquished all her youthful charms, said quietly: "I said, Charles, that some people might think it egotistical. But I did not. I suppose that, no matter what you might have said, somebody would misconstrue it."

"Who cares, mamma?" said Ruth, in a voice flavored with buckwheat cakes and maple syrup.

"You thought I was a little cynical, though, Winny," returned Darlington.

"No," answered his wife, "only a little insincere — a little too adulatory."

"If papa was adulatory, what was Carol?" asked Ruth, mischievously.

"That's what, Ruth," said her father, with a favoring smile at his champion.

"You must all remember that papa had stolen my thunder," laughed Carol. "That is, not foreseeing any need of it myself, I had given it to him."

"I don't know," answered Darlington, dissentingly. "I don't remember of especially asking you for any pointers for that speech."

"Papa Darlington!" exclaimed Carol, astounded, or affecting to be; and even Ruth, her father's self-elected champion, burst into a delighted laugh at this piece of unblushing mendacity; for it was a matter of family knowledge that Carol had helped her father in a way with his speech, just as she helped him in a way with almost every affair of the railroad.

"Well, now, what did you tell me? Be specific!" blustered Darlington, but with a twinkle that betrayed his cause.

"What did n't I tell you?" retorted Carol. "I suspect you have some of those notes I made for you in your coat pocket now."

"Notes!" scoffed her father; "merely some old letters."

"Suppose you show them, papa, just to convince her," suggested Ruth, with a sly glance at Carol.

"I would," said Darlington, lightly, "only there's one or two of those letters that I should n't want your mother to see."

"I saw Willie Stymist trying to report your speech in short-hand last night," said Carol, more seriously. "For the *Intelligencer*, I suppose. He's working there now. If your speech survives that ordeal, it is likely to go down to posterity."

"Willie Stymist!" repeated her father, not just pleased. "I did n't see him there. I guess he was n't reporting my speech."

"Yes, he was," said Herbert, conclusively.

"I don't know what he wanted to do that for," said Mr. Darlington, uncomfortably.

"He probably wanted it for the paper, papa," said Carol, sweetly, "as I remarked before. Unless he wanted it as an example of exquisite English," she added, teasingly. "I wonder if he reported mine?"

"Oh, certainly—and for the same purpose," observed Ruth, ironically.

"I am sure Carol did very well under the circumstances," said Mrs. Darlington, who always took a joke too seriously. "Everybody spoke of how cool and self-possessed she was. I believe she was even cooler than her father." She glanced half-playfully at her husband, but for some reason or other he had fallen into a brown study, and took no notice of this remark.

"She's always cool enough," said Ruth.

"I did n't feel exactly cool, though, mamma," said Carol, ignoring Ruth's thrust. "And I'm afraid it was n't much of a speech."

"It was n't much of an occasion, my dear," answered her mother.

Mr. Darlington continued to confine himself silently to his plate, while the others indulged in an irregular cross-fire about the happenings of the night before, not missing Rose Blumenthal's costume, in which Bert, to the disgust of his sisters, saw nothing out of the way. Finally Mrs. Darlington said, "Herbert, you are not eating much this morning."

"I am not hungry," he answered, briefly, quickly taking a sip of coffee. Certainly his face turned red, but nobody seemed to notice it except Carol, who smiled with a knowingness that Bert considered almost a breach of confidence. He frowned blackly at her, when he had a chance, and she partly straightened her face.

"What time did you get in, anyway, last night?" asked Carol, quizzically.

"About half-past two," he murmured.

"What did Elsie think of the affair — the ball?" she continued, with an impish gleam in her eye.

"She enjoyed it, I think," he answered, stiffly.

"I did n't know," said his sister, innocently. "It was so public. I thought you and she left rather early."

"It was nearly two when we left," he answered, giving her another admonishing glare. "I should n't call it very early."

Before going down to the office, Carol walked out to the stable — a building that many people might have envied for a home — and let herself into one of the box-stalls, which was occupied by a white-footed, white-nosed sorrel mare. The animal gave a whinny of recognition at the sound of the girl's footsteps, and thrust her nose affectionately forward. Carol patted the glossy neck, and rubbed her own cheek against the mare's.

"Well, Footsy girl!" she exclaimed, in a petting voice. "Do you love me this morning? How much do you love me this morning? Quick! How many bushels?" The mare slowly struck the floor ten times with her hoof. "Only ten bushels! Now kiss me!" She held up her hand, and the mare thrust out her tongue twice or thrice and licked the white surface presented. "Tom! How is Whitefoot's hoof this morning?" she called to the hostler. She bent to see for herself, but the light was rather dim. She laid her hand upon the fetlock, and the well-trained animal instantly raised her hoof.

"It's better, ma'am," said the hostler, appearing at the door. "That verdigris is fetchin' her around. The only trouble is the roads is so hard she breaks it out again as fast as it heals."

"Well, I won't exercise her for a day or two," said the girl, with a farewell pat. "It would n't hurt, Tom, to shut that window at night, after this. It's cold."

Her father was waiting at the gate for her, puffing away on his Havana. Herbert, as usual, had gone ahead. The new general-office building, a little gem of Venetian architecture, two stories high only, sparkled in the bright sunlight at the foot of the hill, a block and a half distant. Mr. Darlington's eyes sparkled fondly back upon the building, just as they had every morning from the time the walls had gone up.

"Pretty smooth, Carol!" said he, admiringly.

"Pretty smooth, papa!" she answered, adopting his slang.

"How would it do to have some genuine electric lights in that string of cars, set in behind some way, and turned on at night?" he asked, pausing and glancing at

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the bas-relief work of locomotive and cars, just above the second-story windows.

"I don't know. I never thought of it. We might talk it over," said Carol. This was one of her ways of checking his extravagance.

They did not go into the new building, but walked on down to the old office-building, a block further. Here Carol stopped, but Mr. Darlington, after seeing that the moving of the furniture to the new building was under way, strolled on down-town.

He, like his son, was a well-dressed man. He had that intangible thing called style, which no tailor can either give or take away. One felt it as quickly as one entered his presence. One recognized it in the simple drawing-on of his glove, in the angle at which he carried his cane. It was suggested even by the motion of his coat-tails as he walked. So upright was his bearing that one would not have suspected him of being, as he was, an inch shorter than his son. One might have called him soldierly had it not been for a kind of springy jauntiness in his carriage. His vest line was deflected outward in a graceful, prosperity-suggesting curve, but he was not fat or paunchy.

Handsome he was, too. His black hair and side-whiskers were without a streak of gray. His skin was white and smooth, even on his chin, where it had been shaved over for years. His dark-brown, oblong eyes were perpetually laughing, which led some people into the mistake that *he* was always laughing. But the most striking feature by all odds about his face was his nose, which was as white, smooth, and exquisitely chiselled as a thing in marble.

In younger days, before he married the beautiful

Winifred Colton, Charles Darlington was considered a ladies' man, and it must be said that he had not entirely outlived the distinction at the age of fifty-five. A pretty face always distracted him — at this period of life in a discreet, perfectly correct way ; even in a paternal way, if the face was young. If his wife ever noticed this trait — and who can doubt that she did? — she had too much wisdom and too much confidence in him ever to comment on it. That he ever abused this confidence, nobody ever hinted. With men, he was reasonably popular. He loved the pleasures of life ; and, without ever sinking into excesses, he knew how to make himself a boon companion. In his jaunting around the country with railroad men, his appearance in a private car was always a signal for fun. It is not probable that his associates took him very seriously, except in the matter of his unquestionable ability to "run a railroad up to the handle," to use his own expression.

He liked to bluster, and sometimes he obstinately insisted on standing by his blusterings. Yet if handled properly, no man was more tractable, as every member of his family happily knew. His disposition was naturally obliging. In his heart he was very sensitive to the good-will of others. He had a quiet, self-disparaging way of granting favors that was peculiarly winning ; and though the keener-eyed saw that he thought himself a pretty good fellow therefor, they never seemed to think less of him for it.

Yet, with it all, Charles Darlington was cold-blooded. Toward suffering, in himself or others, he was prone to assume an almost stoical indifference. He was inclined to laugh cynically at the barbs of fortune, whether they pricked his own skin or his neighbor's. In matters of

affection he was undemonstrative, even in the bosom of his family, and he and his children ceaselessly plied one another with harmless jokes. Every member of that family, however, he loved dearly and rejoiced in; and, like everybody else, he at times apparently abrogated all the rules of his being, and exhibited a tenderness as pleasing as it was unexpected.

He turned in at the *Intelligencer* office, and mounted to the editor's room. "Nichols," said he, twirling his cane and puffing vigorously at his cigar, "I've been thinking of running a time-table in the *Intelligencer* and the other papers along the road. Of course, people living on the road know the schedules; we don't run so many trains that they can't remember them; but I believe a time-table in the papers would be a great convenience to travelling-men and strangers generally."

"It undoubtedly would," assented the editor, running his fingers through his thick hair. "It undoubtedly would. In fact, Mr. Darlington," he continued, with the air of a man throwing open his soul to the light of day, "I was thinking of that very thing myself the other day. It would be a great convenience."

"It's business," said the president, conclusively. "Of course, if people are going to ride, they have got to ride on our line; but as I said last night, in my speech," — he paused a second, — "I want to give our people the same conveniences that I'd give them if there were fifty competing railroads running in here. But I'll talk it over with Bert and Carol, and let you know later. Three heads are better than one. About those conductors' report-cards — did Carol say anything to you about them? We've got out a new form, you know. Or, rather, *she* has. Never mind about look-

ing it up. If she has n't ordered them yet, she will. No hurry, anyway."

He waded around the paper-littered room, blowing smoke at the woodcut politicians on the walls, and stopping to poke a wrinkled map with his cane.

"Mr. Darlington," said the editor, adopting a tone that the other instinctively recognized as foreign to business, "that daughter of yours is a wonder."

"How's that, Nichols?" asked the president, genially, without turning from the map.

"The way she spoke last night, in that off-hand way. My wife said that if she had been called on that way, she would have fainted. And ninety-nine women out of a hundred would, too."

"Well, Carol is cool," said the magnate, modestly. "She always was. You can generally count on her doing the right thing about the right time."

"I guess she comes by it honestly," said Nichols, with brazen flattery. "I don't know that anybody carried off their part last night better than you did yours."

Darlington cleared his throat and readjusted his glossy hat, by way of acknowledging the compliment, and said disparagingly: "It was nothing. Merely a matter of business with me. I had something to say, and I said it. That was all." Then, after a pause, "By the way, Nichols, I thought I saw young Willie Stymist making a short-hand report of my speech last night." Upon being assured that such was the fact, he continued, bending forward significantly, "Leave that out, Nichols. It's mere slush, mere rot, simply the promptings of the moment. Good enough for the occasion, to mix in with the music, and all that. But it was entirely informal, and

while I flatter myself that it sounded all right, it was n't meant for cold type. It ain't worth your while to set it up. Just leave that part out, Nichols, and send around to my office, and I'll give you some figures on the building to take its place. They'll read a good deal better. Something substantial, you know. That other stuff was mere balderdash — the effusions of the moment."

"Mr. Darlington, if you will allow me," said the editor, impressively, "I'll disagree with you there. It was not balderdash by any means. It was a shrewd, politic, skilful appeal to the people to lay aside their prejudices against a corporation. It was just what the people need; just what I've been preaching in these columns for years; and it did good, lots of good. I heard twenty comments on it last night, and as many more this morning. You surprised the people, in a way, Mr. Darlington; you showed them a side of your character that they are not familiar with, and never would get familiar with any other way. That speech ought to go out to the people that did n't hear it. But, of course, if you don't want it to go in, it won't go in. The boys are working on it now, but that makes no difference. If you say the word, out she comes. But I assure you, sir, as a man in the habit of feeling the public pulse, that it will have weight and do good."

"Well, I guess you better cut it out," said the official, hesitating.

"All right, sir," said Nichols, uncomplainingly; "but I'll tell you plainly, Mr. Darlington, I'd sooner cut out all the rest of the story than that."

The president was in deep doubt, standing his straightest, and blinking at the editor through a cloud

of rich, blue smoke. "Well, let it go in, then, as long as it's set up," said he. "I don't know as it makes any difference, one way or the other. Only, I thought it was a little — just a trifle — well, *personal*."

"Not at all," said the editor, reassuringly. "When a man of your prominence speaks, the people want him to be personal. You get down to their level then, as it were, and it flatters them. No, sir, you could n't have made a better speech if you had taken a month to prepare it in."

"I would have got more meat in it, Nichols," said the president, blandly. "Maybe too much. Maybe what I gave them was the best thing for the occasion, after all. At least, I thought so at the time. You can let it go in, anyway."

He let himself down the unswept stairs with some dignity. The complacent look on his face was undisturbed by the thought that all his talk about time-tables and report-cards was only a blind to cover his approach to his speech.

Upon reaching the new building again, he saw Carol standing upon the platform, with her hands in her jacket pockets,— the morning was a little frosty,— evidently superintending a painter who was on his knees before the waiting-room door. The man wore that grieved expression which the humblest of the sex will adopt when subjected to the orders of a woman.

CHAPTER IV

A BENEVOLENT CONSPIRACY

"WHAT's up?" demanded Darlington, briskly.

"Nothing — only I'm having these signs changed with some regard to the English language," answered the girl, without lifting her eyes from her kneeling victim.

"What's the matter with *Gents*?" asked her father, bullyingly, but with a subtle undertone of deference. Carol had overruled him so often in spelling, grammar, and kindred matters that it was discreet to approach her cautiously.

"*Gents* are all right in their place, but this waiting-room is likely to be used by a few *gentlemen* from time to time. And as 'Men' includes both 'gents' and 'gentlemen,' we'll have it so that nobody will feel excluded."

The president snorted scornfully, but she denied him the satisfaction of looking up, and he went on: "You are too fine-haired for me. Pretty soon you will be firing agents for leaving commas out of their reports. Why," said he, warming up, "you can ride from Maine to California, and not see a single waiting-room sign painted 'Men.'"

"Oh, no, you can't, papa," she denied, suavely. "A few of them are painted in that way. And in a few years

you can take the same ride, and not see one painted 'Gents.'"

"They do mostly paint 'em 'Gents,' though, nowadays, miss," ventured the painter, pausing on the initial letter, as though he had hopes of the president's victory yet. Carol deigned no answer to this last, and her father said, caustically, "I don't suppose you have got any fault to find with the other one, have you?"

"Yes, sir," said she, with a keen laugh at his surprise.

"What's the matter with *Ladies*?" he demanded stoutly, but feeling the ground slipping from beneath his feet.

"'Ladies' are all right, too; but if you reserve that waiting-room for ladies only, a good many women will have to stand out here under the shed, or affiliate with the 'gents' in this room. As only a small percentage of women are ladies, and as all ladies are women, why not make your waiting-room for 'Women,' and give the fair sex equal hospitality with the men?"

Darlington snorted at this hair-splitting, and even the abject painter allowed himself a sickly, half-fledged grin. But the tall, firmly planted girl, with the well-braced shoulders and the calm blue eye, lorded it over them both, and had her own way. As her father walked off, vanquished, but with his crest high, Carol touched her handkerchief to her lips to hide a smile. She would have smiled more could she have seen her father an hour or two later, when one of his associates at the Business Men's Club dropped in.

"I been lookin' over your place, Charlie," sighed the gentleman, as he dropped into the easiest chair available, for he was rather fat. "I like everything about the shootin' match, except one thing. Don't it strike

you, Charlie, that them names down on the waitin'-room doors is just a little common? Sound kind of flat, don't they — 'Men' and 'Women'? Might offend some of your highfalutin customers, might n't they, especially the ladies?"

The president leaned back in his most effective, most expansive manner. "The only trouble with you, Andy, is that you are not up on English," said he, with an affable smile. Thereupon he repeated Carol's argument in favor of the new lettering with a fidelity which convinced his hearer that Charlie Darlington had more book-learning than most people gave him credit for.

Pending the arrival of the heavier furniture from the old office, Carol got her new quarters into shape. In her hostility to any decorations that might be contemptuously condemned as feminine frailties, she admitted no pictures, dearly as she loved them, except those of a commercial suggestion. On one side of the room hung an ocean liner; opposite, a mechanical drawing in black-and-white of a locomotive. Besides these, were maps, a blue print of the road, and a Rocky Mountain scene, the last redeemed for commercialism by a train of cars crawling over a winding, spiderlike trestlework. She had struggled a little over the admission of plants and sash curtains. Neither her father nor Herbert had them, but she had seen them in other offices, and at last she had given in to her longing.

She left about noon for a half-holiday, — she could do no work until her cabinets and desk came over, — entirely unconscious of the fact that a woman's eyes were reflected in the harmonious blending of the blooming plants, and that a woman's subtle touch was visible in every fold of the sash curtains, as well as in the care-

ful disposition of every rug. And it is barely possible that Carol's heart would not have throbbed so happily, as she flew along behind Whitefoot, had she known that Tommy Scrutcheons, general utility boy around the building, was standing at that moment in the centre of her office, with a cigarette in his mouth, saying to a fellow-incorrigible, as he glanced contemptuously about, "Dis is where the gal hangs out. Looks more like a parlor than a office."

In the morning Carol dropped into her old office for the last time, to see that nothing had been overlooked by the draymen. To her astonishment and vexation, she found that her desk and file-cases had not yet been moved. She hurried over to the new building, ran up the stairs, — nobody was looking, — and flounced into her father's office.

"Papa!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "They have n't moved my desk or file-cases yet. I gave up all yesterday afternoon, so that they could get them over, and now it will be noon before I can do anything."

"Have n't they moved your stuff yet?" asked her father, gruffly, balancing back in his chair. "That's a nice note. That man Webb is n't worth the powder and shot to blow him into kingdom come. I'll have that stuff over here in just ten minutes, by the watch." He left the room for a minute, presumably to give the order. When he returned, he asked, "What do you think of the place?" glancing with justifiable pride around the handsomely furnished apartment.

"It's simply grand!" said Carol, forgetting her troubles in her admiration. "Did the stockholders say you could have that new file-case? Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, despairingly. "And Bert has new chairs

and a settee ! I have the shabbiest old office in the building, and I ought to have the best."

"I don't see anything shabby about your furniture," said the president, complacently lighting a fresh cigar. "The next supply-man I can work for a desk for you, I'll do it. Let's take a look at your place, anyway, and see what you need. Let's see first, though, how Bert has got his new stuff arranged."

"Very poorly," said Carol, a moment later, with a critical survey of the traffic-manager's private office, though that official himself was present. "What have you got all your chairs on one side of the room for, in a straight row, like a jury-box?" she asked of him. "That moss-green settee looks hideous against those curtains. Pull it over here. That is a thousand times better. It's a lovely shade," she added, fondling the plush with a yearning light in her eyes, which caused her father to wink at Herbert. "I feel real jealous, papa. I asked for a settee months ago, and you said the stockholders would n't stand it. They never stand anything, for *me*. You always have to 'work' a supply-man. Well, let's get out of here. I feel decidedly out of place amid this luxury."

She halted the president and the traffic-manager at her door with some trepidation. "I don't know whether you will like the arrangement of my plants or not, but —"

"Plants !" snorted her father.

"Plants !" echoed Bert, but with a glance that assured Carol of his allegiance.

"Yes, sir, plants !" said she, looking her father stoutly in the eye. "I suppose you could ride from Maine to California without seeing one of *those* in a railroad office." She wanted to prepare them for the

sash curtains, but her heart failed her, and she recklessly threw the door open and led the way in.

The first thing that struck her eye was a magnificent ash file-case, glittering with oil and burnished brass. The next was a massive walnut desk of antique style, with carved legs strong enough to support a house. The next was a dark-green upholstered davenport.

"Bert," said her father sternly, before Carol had time to more than gasp, "that hare-brained drayman has made a mistake. I saw these things in the freight-house yesterday afternoon myself, and they were tagged for High Point. He has got them mixed up with the new furniture for your room and mine, and this accounts for his not bringing over Carol's stuff."

But the daughter knew her father too well; besides, she had seen a paper sticking out of the new desk, indicating that the contents of the old one had been transferred thereto. She threw her arms around her father's neck, and gave him a kiss on each cheek. "A thousand thanks, papa. You are an angel."

"I got them cheap," said Darlington, disparagingly, thrusting his hands into his pockets. But Carol was hovering lovingly over the new desk, and paid no attention. "Bert!" he continued, mysteriously beckoning his son over to the window. He began to pinch the dainty sash curtains experimentally between his thumb and finger. "Good stuff, eh! Wash well! Nice thing to catch the dust! Shut out your light nicely on a cloudy day! Look fine in fly time!"

"Oh, I don't care what you say *now*," cried Carol, happily. "You can both be just as mean as you want to, and I'll forgive you. Don't you think they look rather womanish? And do you think you could see

any of *those*, papa, between Maine and California? Do you, or don't you?"

Her father laughed scornfully, but Bert said, "Your room is all right, sis."

"There is only one thing this room lacks," said Darlington, soberly.

"What is that?" asked Carol, attentively.

"Spittoons."

Carol's nostrils inflated contemptuously, as though his objection was too absurd to be seriously answered.

"Yes, sir," continued her father, seriously. "A man talking business in this country never feels at home unless he's got a spittoon in sight. There is something cheerful and homelike about it that draws a man out. I can remember when old Cap Carruthers got a neat streak on—about the time the doctors put him on a short allowance of tobacco—and ordered spittoons off the line from one end to the other. Well, in just three years the A. T. and S. S. was in the hands of receivers. They could n't do business without them."

"Cuspidors or receivers?" asked Carol, mischievously.

"Cuspidors, of course."

"What kind do you think is most conducive to the prosperity of a railroad, brown earthenware or flowered china?"

"Well, china shows the dirt, and earthenware is hard to see after dark," he answered with a twinkle. "To my mind nothing beats a tub full of sawdust."

CHAPTER V

A CLERICAL INTERVENTION

IN conformity with habits formed long before they even knew of the existence of Ashboro, the Darlington's lunched at one o'clock and dined at six. This, of course, was in open defiance of the custom in Ashboro, but the Darlington's were not noted as respecters of customs. One day after luncheon, a week or two after the occupancy of the new building, Carol slowly climbed the oiled stairs to her office. She was tired. Her monthly statement of waybills and abstracts had not balanced, and, it seemed, would not. For three days her little force of clerks had been busily checking the yellow tissue press-copies of the waybills, in search of the error, and verifying the station-agents' figures on their abstracts; and all that morning she herself had pored over big sheets full of small figures. The same big sheets were yet on her desk unconquered. It was, therefore, with a slight sense of irritability that she discovered a stranger in her office, evidently waiting for her.

The man was large, yet so compact and well-proportioned that he suggested strength rather than size. He wore a black Prince Albert coat, buttoned snugly over an athletic chest. His face — a full, smooth oval — was of a ruddy, healthy hue. His reddish-brown hair, which was rather thin, was parted near the centre, at the

top of a high, fine forehead. Beneath this prominent forehead was a yet more striking feature, — a pair of large, round, blue eyes, boyishly clear and innocent, yet containing an indescribable something which would have deterred any but a very rash person from presuming too far upon their boyishness and innocence. Moreover, there was a characteristic turn about his chin and mouth which suggested tenacity, if not indeed pugnacity.

Who the man was, or what he wanted; Carol had not the least idea, though she fancied that he might possibly be a lawyer from some neighboring town. If he was a lawyer, he probably had a claim against the railroad, which might account for that slightly pugnacious look. As Carol unbuttoned and removed her jacket, after saluting the stranger, she half smiled. A great many pugnacious people found their way into her office from time to time, and she had learned pretty well how to hold her own with them. She had no especial liking for such people, but there was something rather wholesome and refreshing about this man's sturdy bearing; and the prospect of a little tilt with him was not at all distasteful to her.

"What can I do for you?" asked Carol, as she sat down at her desk.

"You are Miss Darlington, I believe. My name is Kaltenborn," said the stranger, in a round, full voice. "I come here, Miss Darlington, in the interest of Mrs. Burbanks, whose son Johnnie, as you doubtless know, was killed on your road some time ago."

"Yes, sir," said Carol, promptly. "He fell from the roof of a box-car while intoxicated." Her tone was significant.

Kaltenborn was seated at the other side of the wide table, with one arm resting upon it. He quietly let his azure eyes float across the intervening space. They met hers squarely, and the gauntlet was down.

"Just as he might have fallen from any kind of a roof," said he, with a smile to indicate that he caught her meaning.

"Except that he was trying to set the brake with a broomstick — an infraction of one of our most inflexible rules," added Carol.

"I am convinced that his death was owing to his own negligence," continued Kaltenborn, pleasantly but seriously, "and that the railroad company was in no wise responsible. That, of course, relieves it of any legal obligations in the way of damages. I am sorry that Mrs. Burbanks can't see it in that way, too; but she is a woman, and — I beg your pardon!" said he pausing.

"Go on!" said Carol, laughing.

"Mrs. Burbanks has appealed to you for a pension — so far without success. She has also, perhaps, made threats, which people who are no friends of hers have brought to your ears. How much the threats of that ignorant woman amount to, you know as well as I."

"Unless she falls into the hands of some pettifogging lawyer," suggested Carol, pointedly.

"I am not here to carry out those threats," he returned. "I simply want to bring about an accommodation, if that is possible. I don't base her claim for consideration at your hands on the faithfulness or efficiency of her son's service to your road, for I understand that he was not faithful or efficient. His father, however, was connected with your road from the day your

first wheel turned, and was a faithful, respected employé until the day he met his death in the courageous discharge of his duty. I am here to-day to see if something cannot be done to save his wife and four helpless little ones from public charity. I want to know if there is any possibility of the road granting her a small pension."

He *was* pugnacious, sure enough, Carol decided, as he impaled her on his level gaze. She stiffened a little under the operation, and put on her most official air.

"That is a matter with which I have nothing to do, Mr. — Kaltenborn," she answered, halting a second over the unusual name. "My father deals with all such matters personally. He will be back to-night or to-morrow. But it is only fair for me to tell you, before you put yourself to any further trouble, that Johnnie Burbanks met his death while violating two rules of this company; and were we to allow his mother a pension, it would simply be putting a premium on inefficiency and insubordination in our employés."

"You don't think it would tempt any of them to get killed, do you, for the sake of a pension for their survivors?"

"We have discipline to maintain," said she, quietly.

"Then it is a matter of policy, I may say, with the company?"

"Well, yes," she admitted cautiously.

"It's a matter of bread and butter with Mrs. Burbanks," said Kaltenborn.

Carol flushed, but detected at once the unfairness of the insinuation. "Her lack of bread and butter appeals just as much to me, sir, and to my father, as it does to you," she returned with some spirit. "Your setting bread

and butter against policy would appeal powerfully, no doubt, to a jury," she continued, not doubting now that he was a lawyer, and rather glad of her remark about pettifoggers. "But you will find it not quite so effective with my father."

"I have no doubt of that," he replied, dryly.

"I mean that policy with us, no matter how slightly it may be spoken of, means an honest administration of the affairs of this road; an honest accounting to the people who have intrusted their money in our hands."

"I did not mean to insinuate that you are insensible to suffering," said Kaltenborn, so frankly and generously that Carol felt a little ashamed of her warmth. "I only meant that Mrs. Burbanks's case is stronger than yours in its motive."

"There is some question even about that," she returned with a smile. "You would hardly put physical wants above principle, would you? And you must not hold us responsible for her poverty."

"No, I do not do that. She is poor because her natural supporters have been taken away. But you will not deny that death is a heavy penalty for drunkenness or the violation of a rule. And if this youth had fallen from some other roof than that of a box-car, it is not likely he would have been killed. It was your wheels — wheels that were earning your bread and butter — which ground the life out of him and cut off his mother's bread and butter. You could not help that, and those wheels, dangerous as they are, are very necessary. But cannot you avert the consequences of their cruel work, in a measure? Is it not your duty to do so?"

His honest, fearless eyes repeated the appeal in a

manner that absolutely forbade any quibble or evasion. She doubted now about his being a lawyer.

"If it is," she answered, "we will do it."

"I felt sure of that," said he; "but I am glad, nevertheless, to hear you say it. It is, then, merely a question of determining what your duty is. When Mrs. Burbanks came to me and asked me to make this intercession, I had some difficulty in determining that it was my duty to do so, for I knew the circumstances of her son's death. But after thinking the matter over carefully, I came to the conclusion that something was due her, and I told her so. I told her that I would try to help her. I shall not have tried, in the sense she understands the pledge, until I have exhausted every honorable means. Now, I am aware that you have not the authority, as you just stated, to commit the company to any course in this matter. But I want you to help me. Will you do it?"

"Why, I will do everything consistent with justice, and loyalty to my father and those I serve,—the other stockholders," said Carol, not just relishing this process.

"I could not ask more," he answered. "But I want you to look into this case and decide it on its merits, for *yourself*, first. If you think the pension ought not to be granted, tell your father so plainly, and oppose it to the end. I shall think none the less of you for it. But if you think it ought to be granted, I want you to be just as firm in the other direction. Don't lay the burden of a decision entirely on your father. You are old enough to know that he is not infallible, any more than you or I. He may have certain foibles that you are familiar with; for instance," — he paused a second, — "his intolerance of insubordination in employes may prejudice him a little against Mrs. Burbanks. He may lose sight of the fact

that it is the widow and four little children to whom justice is to be done, and not to Johnnie Burbanks. Will you see, so far as you can, that they get a fair hearing?"

"I have promised," said she, stiffly. "I don't know that I shall have much opportunity to talk it over with my father. That is, we have talked it over a good deal, and I don't know that I have anything new to tell him. Who shall I tell him called — that is, in what capacity?"

"Stephen Kaltenborn, the new pastor of the Methodist Church, of which Mrs. Burbanks is a member."

"Very well," she answered, stirring some papers on her desk, as if to intimate that the interview was ended.

He did not take the hint, however; and, indeed, he looked like a man upon whom a hint would be wasted nine times out of ten, unless he saw fit to accept it. He sat drumming lightly with his fingers and watching her. "I might as well confess to you, Miss Darlington," he said, presently, "that I came here to-day, when I knew that your father was away, because I wanted to speak to you first. I know that this matter has already been brought before your father, and that he has offered Mrs. Burbanks no encouragement."

"If I am not mistaken, he has flatly refused her," answered Carol, dryly.

"I did not so understand it," said he, gravely. "If he has, I hope he may be induced to reconsider his decision. That is what I want you to do for me. I have the most implicit faith in woman, Miss Darlington. I have always believed that, but for her, man would soon sink into his original savagery; and in those transactions which perhaps require a little more of the milk of human kindness and a little less of worldly calculation, I have always found women invaluable allies."

"You are very complimentary to our sex," said Carol, suavely.

"Merely truthful."

"But possibly you mean that we are more easily managed. In that case, you are not so complimentary."

"To say that women are easily led in the right direction seems to me high praise," he returned. "Preachers, in their church work, simply co-operate with this trait in women. And I think that most women like being led, as you call it."

"I don't like it," said she, emphatically.

"Not even if you are being led in the right direction?"

"No. I like to go it alone. People who like to be led are usually weak, I think."

"Many who dislike to be led are not strong, but wayward," he retorted. "However, I did not come here to lead you," he added, smiling. "I want you to 'go it alone.' I don't want you to be led by any man, not even your father."

"I hope you don't overrate my influence with my father," said Carol. "He has his own ideas about certain things, and running a railroad is one of them. Moreover," she continued more seriously, "he cannot always do just as he would like in matters of this kind. The railroad is not a philanthropic institution, and the stockholders, like the poor, are always with us."

"We are not asking for philanthropy," answered Kaltenborn. "All we want is justice — far-seeing, discriminating justice, to be sure ; but only justice."

"I think you will get it," said she, with some reserve. "Only — we must be the judges."

When Kaltenborn arose, Carol affected not to see his half-proffered hand. She hardly thought a hand-shake

necessary. After he had gone, there was a little frowning wrinkle between her brows. She felt piqued. Kaltenborn had plainly come to her, not as the auditor of the H. P., R., A., and S., but as a woman. She was not ashamed of being a woman, and only resented an appeal to her as such when it implied that women were more manageable than men — more easily hoodwinked, as she construed it. Furthermore, the minister had seemed to make a virtue of extracting from her a promise to do what she would have done in any event, namely, give justice. He had taken advantage of his position as a minister, she suspected, to morally browbeat her a little. She was sorry now that she had promised to intervene at all; she had not wanted to promise at the time, but he had manipulated her into a tight place, from which the only decent means of escape was a promise.

Yet, as she rested her slightly angular chin in her hand and gazed thoughtfully at her plants, she was moved to a little, low laugh, in spite of her vexation. It was rather ridiculous. So this was the Reverend Stephen Kaltenborn. She remembered now to have heard one of their servant girls say what a lovely man her new pastor was. Carol could readily see how such a person as Tilly might make a demigod out of this seraph-eyed, deep-chested, plain-spoken, pertinacious preacher; and she could readily see how a man with such a flock might fall into the habit of bullying. It was not exactly bullying, though, — his treatment of her, — she admitted.

Carol knew well enough the obstinate attitude her father had come to hold towards this Burbanks business. Whatever his original position might have been,

outside influence, and, as he believed it, intermeddling influence, had driven him to a purely partisan view of the case. He had come to look upon the whole matter simply as a fight, — the railroad against public opinion. Carol had sided with her father, naturally enough, for family loyalty was one of her strongest traits. Yet this very loyalty, in connection with her official position, was slowly blighting in her some of the most precious qualities of a woman. Charged from birth with too much of her father's cool and calculating nature, she was now going to school to him. Never too tender, she was daily taught that tenderness is too often only another name for a weak, if not cowardly, evasion of the sterner issues of life ; not taught in so many words, not, in fact, in any words, but by daily observation of the workings of her father's business principles, — principles that had apparently won the respect of his associates, and had certainly won him a fortune.

Little manifestations of this development in his daughter caused Mr. Darlington's eyes to sparkle with fatherly pride. Yet C. A. Darlington was not a bad man. He was regarded as a model father, and his own comfort and interests were ever subservient to those of his children. The dearest wish of his heart was that Herbert should make a noble, upright, successful man, and that Carol should make a noble, upright woman. Ruth he looked upon as yet in her mother's exclusive charge. But it must not be supposed that this "business" development of Carol had gone very far yet ; or that she did not often act solely on impulse ; or that she would ever become the person her father was. No tutor, however skilled, however loved by his pupil, could make a man out of a woman.

At a quarter of five Carol telephoned to the house for Whitefoot. In the early part of her drive she found herself approaching the Burbankses' home. Just why she had come that way, she could not have said; it was certainly not to verify the Reverend Kaltenborn's statement of the Burbankses' poverty, for that was a matter of public knowledge. She was not quite certain that she had not come by chance; yet she was conscious of having had the Burbankses in mind ever since the minister's call. She let the mare walk past the shed-like, battened structure to which the family had sunk since Johnnie's death. Mrs. Burbanks was out in the yard, hanging up a washing. Carol involuntarily withdrew her eyes from the wretched creature, and glanced down at her own richly clad figure, so warm, so healthy and clean, so well fed and well groomed, enthroned there on the high-backed seat of her stylish trap. It was hard, awfully hard, she said, with a swelling throat.

But was it *her* fault? "Is it *our* fault, Carol?" she could in fancy hear her father ask, as he flourished his smoking Havana, which cost more than Johnnie Burbanks had ever earned in an hour. The thought comforted her. He who was so good and kind to her and the rest of the family, so free with his money to others, could not be a party to the iniquitous starvation of this helpless woman. If he refused her a pension, it was because he could not conscientiously grant her one.

Still she was not satisfied, and when she announced to her father that night that Kaltenborn had called, and he answered, without looking up from his paper, "I suppose he tried to open your shell with a text," the words grated on her.

"He's coming up to see you to-morrow," said she, seriously.

"He might as well save his shoe leather," answered Mr. Darlington, shortly. Carol smiled, knowing that his heart was not as hard as his words.

"It does seem as though that poor woman was having more than her share of trouble," said Mrs. Darlington softly to Carol, after Mr. Darlington had relapsed into silence. "Mrs. Black told me to-day that one of the children had typhoid fever."

"Where did you see Mrs. Black?" asked Carol.

"She was here collecting for the Ladies' Aid Society."

"Are they helping Mrs. Burbanks?"

"No; she won't take charity yet, as she calls it. I guess she's got a little of the money left yet that Johnnie's lodge paid her, though I presume that was really charity. Johnnie never took any interest in the lodge after the novelty wore off, and he was away behind in his dues."

Mr. Darlington was not so absorbed in his paper as to be oblivious to this dialogue, for he said, lowering the sheet to his lap, "I don't want to be harsh, or say anything cruel, but it would be a God's mercy if that child died. It is nothing but a burden on its mother, and what possible future has it, without education or training of any kind? The chances are, if it grows up in that atmosphere, it will disgrace its mother some day. Poor as she is, I'll give Mrs. Burbanks credit for always holding her head up."

"The child is entitled to a fair trial, Charles," said his wife. "She's such a bright, pretty little thing."

"She would have more show if she was ugly and dull," said the husband, resuming his paper.

"Where did you ever see her, mamma?" asked

Carol. She always wondered how her mother, who never seemed to go anywhere, found out so much about people, especially poor people.

"We had them all out to the guild supper, a few weeks ago."

When Carol kissed her mother good-night, she let her lips lie a moment longer than usual. Mrs. Darlington's unobtrusive sympathy for the miserable family had stirred her daughter's heart. In the same measure, her father's indifference had shocked Carol, and slightly repelled her. But as she bent to kiss him also, a little displacement of his hair struck her fancy as boyish, as youthfully pure and innocent. She instantly repented her momentary hardness toward him, and gave him, too, a kiss of added fervor.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE

For an hour or more Carol twisted and turned in her bed, deep in the problem of justice; but the farther she went, the more intricate became the way. Without the polestar of her father's interests, and the stockholders' — those infinitesimal, but omnipresent stockholders! — she lost her reckoning entirely. She tacked this way and that. Championing in her fancy the widow Burbanks, she made out a clear case for her; deserting to the railroad, she made out a clear case for it. If it were *her* railroad, she knew what she would do; she would grant the pension. But again up came the stockholders, flitting through her bewildered brain like uneasy phantoms, with their reduced dividends in their hands.

She dreamed that these same phantoms held a meeting to consider the Burbanks case, only there was a vast amphitheatre full of them, and Mrs. Burbanks's children had multiplied to the number of the old woman's who lived in a shoe. Johnnie Burbanks came back to life to testify that he had always been a sober and efficient employé. Kaltenborn was there in the form of a giant, with eyes as big as saucers, pleading the widow's cause in a voice of thunder. Finally they all agreed to leave

the decision to Carol, which threw her into such a panic that she woke up.

In the morning she tried to straighten out the maze of the night; but in her heart, before the great Justiciar, she could not come to a conviction. At last she decided, half desperately, and with Kaltenborn's warning ringing in her ears, to leave it with her father. He seemed to be so sure of his ground, so certain of the righteousness of his course; and she would not oppose him, though Mr. Kaltenborn and a thousand other men should scorn her as weak.

About three o'clock in the afternoon Darlington stuck his head in at Carol's door. All day she had started nervously at the click of the latch, momentarily expecting a summons to the president's private office — and Kaltenborn's presence. Now, when she was beginning to breathe easier, it had come.

"Your preacher is here," said her father, briefly. "Come in."

"Papa, I don't want to see him," said she, beseechingly. "You don't need me."

"I want you to be there in case he rings in anything about your promises."

"My promises!" she gasped. "Did he say I — I had promised something?"

"No, and I don't want him to. That's the reason I want you there. Come on."

As they passed the traffic-manager's door Herbert stepped out — by chance, it seemed.

"For goodness' sake, Bert, are you coming too?" asked Carol. "He'll think it's a family conspiracy," and she laughed foolishly.

"Who'll think?" asked Bert.

"Mr. Kaltenborn."

"I think I don't care to be present," answered Bert, significantly, turning back. "I'll see you later, father."

Carol had mentioned Kaltenborn's visit to Bert also, but he had been very reticent about the pension. She did not half like the way he turned on his heel now. Her father, though, merely gave the retreating traffic-manager a look of amused unconcern. He was used to his son's "sentimentality."

"Now, papa," whispered Carol, with her hand on the door-knob, "don't *swe-e-l-l*!"

Kaltenborn bowed gravely to Carol, with no reference whatever in his manner to their former interview. Mr. Darlington, before proceeding to business, took a cigar from his drawer and lit it. Carol wondered if that was exactly polite before a preacher, who presumably did not smoke; but she was glad that her father went no farther in his disregard of conventions. He had once offered a preacher a cigar, and Carol knew it was because he did not like preachers very well.

"Now, Mr. Kaltenborn," began the president incisively, but pleasantly enough, as he leaned back in his swivel-chair, "this case has been up before me until I know it from A to Z. I had thought it was out of the way for all time to come, and that everybody understood it that way."

"Mr. Kaltenborn has just moved to Ashboro," suggested Carol.

"Well, that makes a difference," said her father, in a tone which implied that it did not make a difference. "If you had lived here long, Mr. Kaltenborn, I don't think you would be up here to-day on your present

errand. You would have known too much about the case, and about Johnnie Burbanks. But I am glad to welcome you to the town," he continued expansively, as though—as Carol afterwards put it to his face—Ashboro were only a corner of his backyard. "You will find it a good town. You will find that one of the things that make it good is this railroad, and you will find that nine people out of ten think it's the *main* thing. You will find that that is so because we have the confidence of the people and always treat them squarely."

Carol's mouth dimpled at the corners, as she stole a little flushed glance at Kaltenborn, expecting to find him laughing. He was perfectly grave, however. An ordinary observer might even have thought him impressed.

"I intend to be fair in this case," went on Mr. Darlington. "As I just said, I have been over the ground a hundred times. I have sifted the evidence and re-sifted it, and came to a conclusion long ago, which conclusion Mrs. Burbanks knows very well. But if you have got any facts to offer that are *new*, I am willing to listen to them." He leaned back much as a man might after challenging another to produce a new planet in the solar system.

"I don't know that I have any new facts," said Kaltenborn, leaning forward slightly. "I think the old facts are quite sufficient to justify this widow's claims. In any event, those are the only facts. Mr. Darlington, you know that railroading is a hazardous business. You know that the mortality among railroad employes is very large — so large that they can with difficulty get life insurance with a reputable company. You know that

on account of this extreme hazard railroad companies sometimes grant a totally disabled employ   a pension. In case of death, they sometimes grant the dependents of the deceased a pension. I take it for granted that you admit these facts, and that you can conceive of a case where you yourself would grant a pension."

"Yes," answered the president, frankly.

"I believe that Mrs. Burbanks's case is such a one. Her son may have gotten drunk, and may have used a broomstick to set a brake, and it was doubtless these two infractions of your rules which caused his death. But certainly neither act, nor both combined, would have resulted in his death in a less hazardous occupation. That is, the hazardous work you gave him to do was one of the factors in his death. You are responsible for that factor, as you admit by sometimes paying a pension. The fact that he accepted the work with a full knowledge of its hazardous nature does not relieve you, morally, though it does legally. But all this you admit. Now, as to the other half of the case I hope to make against you," and he smiled a little for the first time, "I need say nothing. I mean the necessity for a pension. You know Mrs. Burbanks's impoverished condition."

"I do, and I feel very sorry for her," said the president, expelling a cloud of rich smoke with some gusto. "I always take great pleasure in helping such people, personally. I would take pleasure in helping Mrs. Burbanks to-day. But you are not asking charity, and Mrs. Burbanks refuses charity, I understand. You are here demanding *dues*. Well, I am here to tell you, Mr. Kaltenborn, that there are no dues. You speak of railroad pensions. If you know anything about such

things, you know that they are rare and given only in cases of special merit — not to drunks, or to their mothers, innocent as those mothers may be. That may seem hard on the mothers, to you ; but it is based on strict justice, as you will see. Johnnie Burbanks lost his life through drunkenness and insubordination. If he had n't been drunk and had n't used a broomstick in a brake-wheel, he would have been alive to-day, in spite of his hazardous occupation, which you seem to make a point on.

"There is not a railroad in the United States," he continued, "or an express company, or any other corporation, that would grant a pension under those circumstances. There is not a court in the land that would uphold Mrs. Burbanks's claim to a pension, were pensions a matter of legal compulsion. Yet I am willing to admit that conditions are a little different here. We know most of our employés personally, and we perhaps take more interest in them and their families than would be the case with a great railroad. I don't mind telling you," softening his voice a little, "that so far as I am concerned, personally, I would willingly give this woman a pension. But it would only be charity, and as president of this road I cannot, in justice, vote one cent for charity without the consent of every stockholder in it — which I don't think I could get in this case. In strict justice — and that is what you are talking about — I could n't vote away one cent for charity without the consent of the *heirs* of every stockholder. For by so doing I should impose a policy upon this road that we and others after us would be forced by public opinion to adhere to. It is n't a mere matter of one case, or of dollars and cents. It's a fact that I own most of

the stock of this road, and that when I vote away two cents of all the other stockholders' money, I vote away five cents of my own. But I have n't the right to vote away that two cents without their consent."

"Suppose you make a little broader application of that principle," interrupted Kaltenborn. "Some of the stockholders, so I understand, were opposed to the erection of such an elaborate building as this. They thought it was throwing money away to gratify your pride. But that did n't prevent your voting the necessary appropriation, over their heads."

"That was an entirely different case, Mr. Kaltenborn," answered the president. "That was merely a difference of judgment. I thought this building was necessary; they did n't. My interests were greater than theirs, and I carried the day. If I am right, they will gain by it, with me. But this charity business is another matter. I *know* that I have no right to vote money that way. The amount is small, of course, but when it comes down to a matter of principle, one cent is just as important as one dollar, or a thousand of them, or a million, for that matter. And there are still others to be considered. I refer to the sober, industrious employés of this road. If any money is to be given away, it ought to go to their survivors; and every cent voted for such cases as Mrs. Burbanks's, worthy as she herself may be, is an injustice to some sober, hard-working man who as certainly as our trains run will meet death some day. No, I am very sorry, Mr. Kaltenborn, but I can't take your view of the matter. I have given this matter considerable thought — conscientious thought, as I said before. Johnnie Burbanks was a worthless, inefficient employé who died while drunk on duty, and to pay his

dependents a pension would be putting a premium on insubordination and inefficiency."

The president finished with his brown eyes glistening with earnestness, his white, shapely hand eloquently in the air. Carol, whose cheeks were rosy from interest, heaved a tremulous little sigh of relief. Whatever doubts she may have had of the righteousness of her father's course were removed now. She thought Kalt-born also must be convinced, not only of the justice and sincerity of her father, but also of his correct position. He did not look it, however. His face was set in thought as he slowly turned a glass paper-weight between his fingers, and a tenacious line ran through his lips.

CHAPTER VII

THE CORPORATE SOUL

"You said that Johnnie Burbanks was worthless and insubordinate," Kaltenborn began, as though laying down his premises.

"He was," said the president; "the most worthless employ   on the road. He could n't have held his job a day on any other road in the United States."

"Why did you retain such a worthless employ  ? Or why did you hire him in the first place?" asked Kaltenborn, penetratingly. "You must have known his character."

"Simply and solely on account of his father's services," said the president. "He — his father — died in a wreck. He was one of our oldest and most faithful employ  s. We appreciate that kind of service, and are willing to show our appreciation in a substantial way. His boy could n't hold down a job anywhere else, and was out of work, and we took him on."

"Then you felt under some obligation to the family?"

"Not obligation exactly, though I suppose you might call it that."

"Then you simply used Johnnie Burbanks as a means of discharging that obligation, if I may so call it," continued Kaltenborn, steadily.

"That was all," assented the president, but beginning to get wary.

"You did n't ask the stockholders' permission to do that?"

"Certainly not," answered Darlington, brusquely.

"Even though you did n't regard the hiring of that boy as conducive to the interests of the road, as you did the erection of this building?"

"I don't call a meeting of the directors every time we hire a brakeman," returned the president, rather sharply.

"No, and I should n't think it necessary," continued the preacher, calmly. "I think you had a perfect right to discharge, of your own authority, the railroad's obligation to that family by hiring the boy. The means you employed were all right. But now, Mr. Darlington, death, with or without any culpability on your part, has removed that means. Your obligation still remains. Mrs. Burbanks has done nothing to forfeit it. Will you let it lapse merely because she has n't another son to offer you? Is that your only means of discharging your obligation? Does it make any difference to her whether the money comes to her from you direct, as a pension, or through her son's hands, as wages?"

Carol looked at her father anxiously; the railroad's case did not seem quite so clear now. Her father twisted around in his chair a little, and threw one leg over the arm of it.

"You forget the extent of the obligation, as you call it," said he, complacently. "It was not perpetual. If you give a beggar twenty-five cents a week for a year, because he stopped a runaway horse for you, you don't have to keep it up to the day of his death, to discharge your obligation."

"If young Burbanks had not been killed, you would still be hiring him, would you not?" asked Kaltenborn.

"I don't know," answered the president, stiffly. "He was getting more shiftless every day."

"But if he had n't got worse, you would still be hiring him?"

"I don't know. I suppose so," he admitted. "But there is a difference between paying a pension and hiring a man. A pension is a clear gift. In hiring a man we get some service, even if he is a poor man. It saves us hiring another one."

"But you said this man was worthless," interrupted Kaltenborn, dryly.

"He was," repeated the president, sharply. "But when I say worthless, I don't mean that he could n't set a brake or swing a lantern. He earned some of his wages."

"About how much?"

"I don't know," answered Darlington, his crest beginning to rise. "I can't split hairs like that."

"You have some idea."

"Well, half of them, say."

"And you paid him how much?"

"Thirty dollars a month, I believe."

"If he earned only half of that, you gave him outright fifteen dollars every month. In other words, you gave Mrs. Burbanks, through her son, fifteen dollars a month for which the road got no return, and for which you expected no return. She would be satisfied now, Mr. Darlington, with half that much a month as a pension."

Kaltenborn turned his calm gray eyes from father to daughter; but railroad stock was away down now, and

the auditor was pressing an ivory ruler into the palm of her hand until the pink surface was barred with blood-red lines.

"Your logic is good, Mr. Kaltenborn," said the president, recovering his amiability. "You make a good advocate. You ought to have been a lawyer instead of a preacher. But you are not a railroad president yet. You look too hard in one place. You forget what I said about a precedent. You want me to act in this matter as though it was the only case that would ever come up."

"If it's right to give this pension, as you seem to have just admitted, you ought to be willing to do it regardless of precedents," said Kaltenborn.

"You don't believe that, if you will stop to think," returned the president, shrewdly. "Would you do a right if it entailed two wrongs upon you? Would it, in fact, in that case *be* a right? That's what I'm getting at."

"If it's right to give a pension in this case, it would n't be wrong to give a pension in all future cases of like nature."

"Certainly not — if the public would only discriminate. Every case would be a like case with them."

"Were you not establishing a precedent by hiring a worthless man?" pursued the minister.

"No," answered Darlington, flatly. "That did n't go on the books; it is n't a matter of record."

"It was a voting away of the stockholders' money in pure and simple charity; as much so as the other would be," persisted Kaltenborn.

"Well, what would you have had me do?" demanded the other. "Harden my heart, and let them stifle in

poverty?" The president's question was so patent a dodging of the point that Carol glanced uneasily at Kaltenborn.

"No," he said. "Nor would I have you do that now. You did right. You simply exercised that large discretion with which, as president of this road, you are necessarily invested. I would have you exercise the same now. Mr. Darlington," he went on, laying aside, as it were, his clerical habit, and leaning over the desk familiarly, "don't you believe that, if no outsiders had worried you about this pension, and if Mrs. Burbanks had always been a little more discreet, and a little more grateful, perhaps, for what you have already done for her, you would have granted this pension, not for her son's sake, but for her husband's sake?"

"I do not, for the reasons I have stated," said Mr. Darlington; but his buoyancy was gone, and he looked tired.

"Don't you think that it ought to have been granted?" pursued Kaltenborn, with an insinuating smile.

"Certainly not, or I should have granted it," retorted Darlington, sharply, and Carol herself thought Kaltenborn's remark a little impudent.

They talked an hour and a half, going over the same ground again and again. Neither would give way an inch. Kaltenborn made his points in the same quiet, persevering way; his manner did not once lose its mildness, though his words were sometimes merciless. The president maintained his equanimity, too, pretty well, but he looked tired, and his eyes toward the end wore a worried expression. Yet he made no effort arbitrarily to end the interview, and he met Kaltenborn's sallies each time with a patience that rather surprised his daughter.

She herself was afloat on a sea of doubt. When her father was talking, she was against a pension ; when Kaltenborn was talking, she was for one ; when neither talked, she was both for and against. But she half believed, as the contest drew to a close, that her father, in his heart, wanted to grant the pension, but was withheld by pride and a desire to maintain his original position.

At last they seemed to be done. They were as far apart as ever, but everything that could be said had been said and re-said. Suddenly Kaltenborn turned upon Carol with an abruptness that startled her, and asked, "Miss Darlington, what do you think?"

"I—I—I don't know just what to think," she faltered. "There seems to be so much to be said on both sides. But I think—that is, I am inclined to believe—I should say—" She paused an instant, oscillating between her conflicting thoughts ; a word, a glance, would have swung her decisively one way or the other. Kaltenborn would not give it—his face said as much. Her father, too, looked at her impassively, with a queer light in his eyes. "—I should say that my father is right," she concluded.

Darlington quietly lowered his eyes, but with a baffled expression that puzzled his daughter. Then, when it was too late, a terrible suspicion flashed over her. He had wanted her to decide against him ! She saw it all clearly enough, she thought. She saw his stubborn pride fighting against his heart, and possibly—she was loath to admit it—against his sense of justice. She saw him grasping at her as a drowning man grasps at a straw, for her decision against him would have allowed him to grant the pension under protest, as it were ; and then, with a sense of bitter shame, she saw

herself fail him — not in loyalty, but in that spotless integrity to which he had vainly lifted his arms. At the crucial moment she had not been conscious of weakness or vacillation; but now the conviction that she had been weak bore down upon her with crushing force.

At her answer Kaltenborn had also simply dropped his eyes, in what was probably nothing more than disappointment; but to Carol's sensitive mood it was scorn, and it cut her to the heart. It angered her, too, for it seemed to imply superior virtue in him.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Kaltenborn, that we can't come to an agreement in this matter," Carol next heard her father saying, "but you see things one way, and we another. I believe you are honest in your convictions; I ask the same judgment of ours. We look at these things from a different standpoint. Your business is different from ours. You get to looking at things in a different light. You see a good deal of suffering, and your sympathy becomes enlarged until possibly you sometimes mistake mercy for justice."

"Not in this case," said Kaltenborn, coldly, as he rose. "And I have lived too long to come into a railroad president's office with a case of sympathy."

"That is all right," answered Mr. Darlington, with a meekness that surprised Carol. "Sympathy goes further in this office than you may suspect. I have a good deal of sympathy for this woman, and" — he drew a twenty-dollar note from his vest-pocket — "if you choose, you may give her that with my compliments." He tossed the bill toward Kaltenborn.

Kaltenborn buttoned up his coat, and took up his hat. "Well, the case is now out of my hands — and

yours," he said. "I hope that your conscience is as clear as mine. I pledged myself to use my influence in this matter, and I believe you will admit that I have done it, to the utmost. Good-afternoon."

"You have forgotten your bill, I guess," said the president, in an assumed tone of carelessness.

"I did not forget it," answered Kaltenborn, pausing with the air of a man who has a disagreeable duty to perform. "I left it. Mrs. Burbanks has not as yet asked for charity. She will no doubt have to accept it soon, but I cannot advise her to take your money. I will see, though, that she gets its equivalent." And he passed out.

"Confound his impudence!" growled the president deep in his throat, puffing ferociously at his cigar. He took two or three turns up and down the room, furtively glancing at his daughter, who was still toying abstractedly with the paper-knife. "What did he mean by saying that the case was out of his hands, and ours? Going to sue?"

"He could n't mean that," answered Carol, preoccupiedly, but she did not say what she thought he had meant. She suspected that Kaltenborn referred to an Arbitrator who never makes mistakes, and she had an idea that her father, too, suspected as much.

"Nine preachers out of ten can't give anybody but themselves credit for conscientiousness," Mr. Darlington continued, complainingly; and again he plunged, neck-deep, into that subject which he had just assured Kaltenborn he had thought closed for all time. He threshed the well-beaten straw with vigorous strokes, as though he fully expected yet to beat out a goodly measure of grain from the empty heads. Carol knew well enough

what he wanted ; he wanted her to play Kaltenborn, his antagonist, and courteously allow herself to be routed at the proper moment, — a man of straw, to be knocked down with conscience-soothing blows. It was a rôle that she had dutifully played many times in the past, but to-day she had no heart for the comedy. It was too much like tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TUG OF CONSCIENCE

CAROL's ride that afternoon behind Whitefoot was anything but pleasurable. She drove at once into the country, and chose the least frequented road she knew — hardly more than a weedy lane. The town was hateful to her just then. Ordinarily, the busy world, seen through her alert, practical eyes, seemed throbbing with pleasure and prosperity. But to-day she felt so lonely that she cried behind her veil, all to herself. She was not thinking particularly of Mrs. Burbanks either, unless, indeed, it was to dislike her as the indirect cause of her troubles.

For the first time in her life she beheld her father as a fallen angel. For the first time in her life an unnamable something stood between her and him ; and in the yellow, chilly sunshine of that late autumn afternoon, it seemed to her that this something could never, never be removed. The thought caused her another little spasm of anguish. She had seen her father untrue to himself, and he had seen that she saw it.

For years she had noted his little foibles, had humored them, loved them, and played on them. But what she had seen to-day was not so innocent. She tried to think of it as being so ; she tried to think of it as only a little foolish pride, — not a commendable thing, to

be sure, yet excusable. But that haggard look in his eyes — she was sure now that it was haggard — branded her excuses as lies; and she knew that he had been troubled, even as she had been troubled, with thoughts of the destitute widow and her children which would not down.

Dinner was a rather gloomy function that day at the Darlington's. Neither Carol nor her father had much to say. After the meal, he took his paper, and retired to his study, instead of reading in the sitting-room, as usual. Mrs. Darlington waited until he had gone, and then asked Carol, in what the latter thought a ridiculously profound tone, what had been decided about Mrs. Burbanks.

"As I understand it, mamma," answered Carol, rather sharply, "that matter was decided some weeks ago. The interview to-day was merely a courtesy on papa's part. She is to get no pension."

Mrs. Darlington said nothing. She had outgrown the folly of opposing her husband when once his mind was made up. But Ruth spoke up warmly: "I don't care, Carol; I don't think it would hurt papa any to give them a pension, with Mr. Burbanks and Johnnie both dead — and killed on our road."

"It happens, Ruth, that it is not all your papa's money to give away," said Carol, loftily.

She went up to her room sadly ruffled; but she had hardly abandoned herself to her mood when Bert came in — with a funereal air, it struck her. Still, he lighted a cigar, and leaned his tall form against the mantel-piece quite comfortably. "What did you and father do about that Burbanks business?" he asked, almost the first thing.

"We simply stood by our former decision," answered Carol. She thought he might have asked such a simple question at the table.

"Father is dead wrong about that," said Bert, bluntly.

"Why is he dead wrong, Mr. Wiseman?" she asked ironically.

"Because he is bucking public sentiment, for one thing," said he; "and because I believe we are duty-bound to keep that woman out of the poor-house. It's a fair and square case for a pension, if there ever was one."

"Why did n't you come in there, then, to-day, and say so?"

"I have said it — more than once," answered Herbert, with a shrug. "But when father wants to, he can be as obstinate as any intelligent man I ever saw."

"Bert, he is *not* obstinate!" protested Carol, indignantly.

"It's true," conceded Bert, "that anybody can approach him, and he'll listen, and be governed by reason, too. But when he gets started on the wrong tack, there is no swinging him. For instance, those rear signals on passenger trains."

They both smiled at recollection of the incident, in which their father had insisted on certain colored lanterns being used, and had turned a deaf ear to the protests of every employé on the road, of the other officials, of the directors, and of everybody else.

"He was obstinate that time," admitted Carol, laughing. "But do you suppose for one minute, Bert," she continued, reproachfully, "that papa would keep that woman out of anything that he honestly thought was due her?"

"Of course not," answered Bert, and Carol fervently wished she could have had his simple faith. "But he's been pulled and hauled until he does n't know where he stands. Then, on top of it all, comes this preacher. It's a wonder he did n't toss him out of the window."

"Have you seen the preacher?" asked Carol, drolly.

"No. Why?"

"I thought not. If you had, you would n't wonder in that way."

"Big?" asked Bert, smiling.

"He is n't so big," said she; "but, as old Bill Blue used to say, 'pow'ful firm, pow'ful firm.'"

"Poor old Bill!" murmured Bert, reminiscently, sending a cloud of smoke down toward the fire. "I saw his wife over at Rankelman the other day. She looks blacker than ever." After a pause he continued. "No, I honestly believe, sis, that if they had given father time, if they had n't jumped on him so hard, he would have granted that pension. He doesn't believe that, of course. He has been bullied so long that all he can see is the railroad's side. I hope not, but I believe he will live to regret his decision in this case."

Carol winced, but answered pointedly: "And yet to-day you backed out of it, and shed your responsibility gracefully enough."

Bert flushed a little. "It may have looked so," he said; "but I was n't going in there to agree with father, and how would it have looked for me, an official of the road and his own son, to go in there and fight him before an outsider and in the outsider's interest?"

"You would n't come because it was n't dignified, but you left it all to me," said Carol, with considerable feeling, "just as though I did n't have any dignity. And

you knew, Bert, that I — that I agreed with papa. And then, when we did the very best we knew, and tried — and tried to be just to everybody, you and mamma and Ruth all act as though papa and I were — dishonest !” The sob that had choked her utterance now came forth, and abruptly bursting into tears, she turned and threw herself face downward across the bed.

Bert stood in silent surprise a moment ; then, with a smile, he walked across the room, and sat down beside her. “Confound it, sis !” he exclaimed, “I did n’t say any such thing, or think such a thing. Neither did Ruth nor mother. I did n’t blame *you*, anyhow.”

“I am just as bad as papa,” she sobbed.

“Neither of you is bad,” protested Bert. “That’s all nonsense. It’s all nonsense for you to be crying, too. I can’t believe that father is right in this matter, and I have told him so. But nobody is imputing any sinister motive to him, or to you, or to anybody else. You are too sensitive all of a sudden. Don’t you think it would be a good idea for you to apologize to your brother for such unkindness?”

He laughed, and leaned over, and playfully pulled her hands away from her face. After a moment, she sat up, and pushed the hair out of her eyes, and laughed, a little shamefacedly.

“Forgive me, brother. You know I did n’t mean anything. But I feel so bad about this thing. I’m afraid maybe papa is n’t right, and I’m afraid that maybe I have n’t been as honest with him as I might have been.” She wanted to tell Bert of the momentous instant when Kaltenborn had appealed to her, but she was afraid of doing her father an injustice. “It is n’t an easy matter to decide, Bert ; and if it were put to you

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as it was put to papa, you'd think a long time. It's easy enough to settle these things until something depends upon your decision. Then it is n't so easy. If papa was n't so conscientious, he could have settled it one way or the other long ago, and saved himself lots of worry. There's more to be said on both sides than I ever dreamt of before to-day. I thought I knew all about it, but—men are natural debaters, I believe. A woman would never think of all those things."

"Of course not," said her brother, teasingly.

"But I think she would decide as justly," she qualified; "only, she would go at it differently."

At that moment a maid announced Mr. Cash Winter below.

"I wish he had come at any other time," said Carol, rising, and looking into the glass of her dressing-table.

"My complexion is a fright now, thanks to Mrs. Burbanks. How do my eyes look at a distance?" swinging around.

"All right," said Bert, vaguely, snapping his watch. "I think I'll go down town."

"Are you sure it's down?" she asked, as she touched her flushed cheeks with a powdered chamois-skin.

"Yes. Elsie's at choir practice to-night. I may call for her."

CHAPTER IX

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

CAROL DARLINGTON'S complexion was what may be called a composite. She had her father's pearly, transparent skin, but beneath this her robust English mother had laid a ruddy background. This inlaid coloring was always visible in Carol's face, — delicate, distant, and subdued ; but under excitement or exercise or exposure to the wind, the under hue surged to the front, permeating the pearly enamel with a ruddy glow. This refreshing effect Carol was pleased to denounce as "blowzy," and it was this blowziness that she was now trying to subdue with powder.

When she descended to the music-room, where she knew she would find Winter, Bert was standing in the centre of the room, with his hat and overcoat on, discussing a foot-ball score with Winter. The latter was seated at the piano, lightly touching the keys while he talked. He was a perfectly pressed, perfectly starched young man of thirty or thereabouts, with a shrewd and kindly, if somewhat worldly, face. His mild, well-bred eyes were without depth ; his hair was light in color, and rather thin ; his face was bloodless, and suggestive of weak affections.

Carol saluted her visitor familiarly, and as soon as Bert had gone, sank languidly into a chair close to the fire. "Play something, Cash," said she.

He played half a dozen somethings of a light and popular nature, one or two of which he accompanied with his voice. Then he left the piano, and dropped into an easy-chair.

"You play something," he said.

She lazily told him that he didn't want her to play anything. He insisted, quite as lazily, that he did. She finally got up, looked leisurely through her rack for some music, failed to find it, and started to play from memory. It was a very informal time. Carol made a mistake, and stopped in the middle of the composition to practise the difficult part a little — without apology and without embarrassment. Then she came back to her chair, and began to talk about horses.

Winter listened to her remarks on Whitefoot's cracked hoof as attentively as though she were setting up a new theory of light or heat. He suggested several good remedies, and mentioned their effect on his horses' hoofs. Carol had tried most of them, and found them failures, she said. Next, Winter told her of a horse he had seen that day, a trotter, with a record of 2.20. He suggested that Carol should buy him; but she shook her head, and said she did not have the money, and that her father thought the stable already too full of horses.

However, she asked for a description of the horse and the name of the owner. When Winter gave her the name of a farmer, she said she might drive out that way.

He asked next about the new switch the railroad company was laying, and censured it as being too circuitous. He sketched a diagram of the H. P., R., A., and S. tracks on the back of an envelope, and showed her how, by connecting two other switches, forty rods of track could be saved.

"I know," said Carol, listlessly. "We thought of that, too; but we need the new switch to make up trains on, anyhow. It will save building a siding."

She in turn asked about the improvements on the Ashboro Inn, of which hotel Winter was owner and manager, and he launched out on that theme for perhaps the hundredth time with her. The dimensions, finishing, wall-paper, and hard-wood floors of the hotel were about as familiar to her as to him. When he came to an end, Carol's lids were drooping drowsily.

"I'm half sick to-night, Cash," said she, apologetically.

"Sick or lazy?" he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"No, really, I feel bad."

"I feel sick myself," said he, rather vaguely.

"Mine is over-work," Carol explained, with a flicker of humor.

"That's what the doctors diagnose mine."

A pause followed.

"I have been re-hearing the Burbanks case again," said Carol presently.

"I thought that was settled."

"So did I," she returned.

"I should think your father would leave 'not at home' orders with the office boy for her representatives."

"Papa is too conscientious for that," answered Carol.

Winter gave her a half-quizzical glance, to ascertain, apparently, if she really meant it. Evidently she did.

"Who's handling her case?" he asked.

"She has a new advocate now, — the Rev. Stephen Kaltenborn, of the M. E. Church. Know him?" she asked roguishly. Presumably Cash's clerical acquaintances were not numerous.

"Yes, I do. He stopped at the hotel a day or two

when he first came here. Preachers generally board around among their parishioners, I believe, till they get settled. He does n't look much like a preacher. I sized him up, when he came in, for the advance agent of the new woollen works,— or something like that."

"Oh, Cash!" she murmured, half in protest, half in merriment. "Don't you think he's sincere?"

"He may be sincere enough. I did n't see anything to the contrary. But there's nothing clerical about him. I never talked with him any. He's a taciturn kind of a fellow, and one that I'd hate to make mad. What kind of a talk does he put up?"

"Good talk; he argues like a lawyer."

"And still he lost his case," he smiled.

"Yes," said Carol, after a pause.

"Your father is right about it," said Cash, briskly. "Anybody of sense ought to see that; and yet you'd be surprised to hear the people that score him for the stand he has taken."

Carol wanted to ask who, but she did not suppose that Winter would care to tell tales; so she answered, defiantly, "I think he can stand it. They'd abuse him whichever course he took. If he granted the pension, there would be talk about his overruling the stockholders, just as there was in the case of the new building. I notice the stockholders are keeping pretty quiet about this pension. They are quite willing to let papa shoulder the responsibility."

When Winter left, about ten o'clock, Carol followed him to the door, where he lit a cigar. Then she gave him a slim, mobile hand, with a simple, "Come again, Cash!" and walked back to the sitting-room, stopping to touch up her hair before the glass in the hall-tree.

"What an intellectual time Cash and I always have!" she murmured, smiling at herself in the glass. But her face quickly sobered. Some joking remark of Bert's about Cash's mental limitations had come to her mind with unpleasant force.

In the sitting-room, Ruth sat absorbed in a book. Mrs. Darlington was crocheting a man's necktie, — a kind of domestic work then in vogue. She was not much of a reader. Winifred Colton had been a girl of striking beauty; and even now, at forty-seven, the mother of three living children and two dead ones, she was a woman who would command a second glance anywhere. Her complexion was yet as fresh as a girl's. She was undeniably plump, and this plumpness was perhaps unduly emphasized now by the loose gown she wore; but in street or dress costume, rigorously stripped of every flounce and ruffle, and fitted with adroit snugness, she exhibited a queenly grace. Her hand was almost as small and soft as when Charles Darlington sued for it.

For years none of the family had been able to inveigle Mrs. Darlington on to a set of scales, but there was a story in the domestic circle to the effect that she weighed a few pounds more than her husband. The truth of this she strenuously denied, but always with a queer little blinking of the eyes and a guilty flush that belied her words. When the automatic penny-weigher was first set up in the waiting room of the H. P., R., A., and S., Herbert removed the plate which explained the character of the machine, and lured his mother on to the platform under promise of telling her fortune. However, as the long pointer swept around the face of the dial, its real office flashed upon Mrs. Darlington, and she stepped off the platform

with a little cry, just as the pointer trembled over 160. She declared afterward that it had already come to a stop, but she could never be induced to prove her statement.

When Winnie Colton married Charles Darlington, she disappointed those friends who had predicted a plain husband for her on the popular theory that beautiful women always marry plain men. She probably also disappointed, by her choice, other friends, and in a more essential way. Her marriage took place long before a railroad presidency loomed on young Darlington's horizon. He was then chief clerk to the car accountant of a Southern railroad, at a salary of twelve hundred a year. Before that — and not very long before, either — he had been a telegraph operator in the general offices of the same road, at sixty dollars a month. Before that, he had been successively an apprentice in the shops, a railroad news-agent, a fireman, a brakeman, a supply conductor, and a station agent.

In view of these and other scraps of young Darlington's history, the value of Winifred's match was a mooted question among her friends. Some saw beneath the handsome exterior of the young man a sterling worth destined to carry him to the front; others — the greater number, perhaps — saw in him a restless, capricious spirit, impatient of the ordinary slow approach of honors and destined to send him flying hither and thither in a vain pursuit of fortune, dragging his devoted young wife with him, and leaving her ever without a home.

Both sets of prophets agreed, however, that Winifred Colton was just the woman to handle Charles Darlington. This opinion may or may not have had a distant and wholly unobjectionable reference to Darlington's widely

recognized popularity with the ladies, and to a certain catholicity of heart in him which made him the victim of every woman in distress—especially if she was pretty.

With rare amiability, Darlington brought to pass the predictions of everybody. He did drag his wife from one end of the continent to the other, and back again; but whether his course was east or west, north or south, it was always upward. This partly compensated his wife for the rough jostling she received, for the ever-present uncertainty, for the frequent snapping of ties, and the periodical immersion into a community of strangers.

But the compensation was only partial. The few hundreds a year—later, the few thousands—which her husband added to his salary by these successive changes did not reconcile her fully to the loss of a home she had begun to love. The added comforts and luxuries these hundreds and thousands bought never soothed the heartache of the long, lonely days, when Charles was busy at the office.

Once, when they were living in Cincinnati, Mr. Darlington came home to their six o'clock dinner in great haste, with the announcement of a "deal" on hand,—a word his young wife was beginning to dread. This deal, he said, would take him back to the office that night, and might result in their moving to Kansas City within a few weeks. They were then living in a beautiful cottage on Walnut Hills, around which nest of a twelvemonth the tendrils of the young wife's heart had just begun to wrap themselves, after their last rude disruption in Washington, D. C. Herbert was then two years old. Carol had not yet come, but was expected. That night, as the

young wife and mother stitched away at the little filmy garments which have been baptized in so much of woman's heart-blood, her tears flowed fast and free, until at last she could no longer see to work. With a little gasp, she dropped the fabrics to the floor, threw herself desperately upon a couch, and abandoned herself to a tempest of grief.

She cried until her bosom was sore ; then, long before her belated husband came home, she bathed the redness of her eyes away, combed her hair anew, and put on the gown that he most admired. She met him at the door, long after midnight, with a kiss. Encircling his neck with her arms, bare half-way to the elbows, she said, "Forgive me, husband, for not saying at dinner that I was glad you might get a better position. I am. And I am *so* proud of you." But the hope she had been harboring in her breast took wings when he informed her that he had accepted the office of traffic-manager of the Kansas and Western Railway, and that they would move in two weeks. She could not help laying her head upon his bosom for a little cry.

In time, though, she became able to subordinate this home-love to her pride in her husband's success. Another and, as it might seem, a merely trifling circumstance caused her more trouble in the end. She could not accustom herself to the fact that her husband had been born to the legacy of feminine admiration ; such admiration as society is always ready to bestow upon certain favored mortals ; an admiration which society has a perfect right to give, and which the favored mortal has a perfect right to receive. Mrs. Darlington, though, doubted the latter right. Her husband was all the world to her, and it was intolerable pain for

her to think that she was not all the world to him. Therefore, in the beginning of her wifhood, while her spirits were yet as high as a colt's, she chafed a good deal at this circumstance, innocent as her husband was in the matter. Sharp words passed between them at times, followed on her part by scalding tears in solitude and miserable hours of loneliness and remorse. But he, instead of getting angry, usually laughed at her foolishness, and kissed away her tears, and promised never to do it again, without knowing just what he had done. Naturally, he always did it again.

But there came a time, after the billing-and-cooing season of their mated life had waned, when her husband's popularity with other women bothered Mrs. Darlington no more. She learned to believe what she had always known — that her husband's fidelity to her was a rock upon which she could rest in security. She divided his smiles and his amiability and his compliments with other women ; but his love was hers alone. As time went on, he less often kissed her, less often told her that he loved her, but she took it all for granted. If her heart was hungry at times, as it doubtless was, for a manifestation of his love in the old way, she comforted herself with the thought that her husband was only as other men are.

Before her first child was born, she had many a lonely hour. The Darlingtons lived in hotels a great deal. The first three or four months in a new town were usually spent in a hotel, while Darlington was looking for a suitable home. About this home he was as fastidious as though he intended to end his days there. Frequently he bought a place, and went to work to remodel it, which meant several months more of hotel life.

Meanwhile, they picked up their acquaintances as they could. Darlington's position was always an honorable one, but naturally it could not give him an entrance on short notice into the best society, for his work took him to large cities only — railroad centres — and the society of large cities is always incrustated, properly enough, with a hard shell. The Darlington, therefore, associated largely with railroad officials and their families. It was a promiscuous society at the best, without traditions or the homogeneity which comes from traditions, and was always changing, just as the Darlington themselves were.

It was a "railroad" society, strictly. Success in railroading gave an entry into it; ex-brakemen, ex-mechanics, ex-agents figured in it under sonorous titles, after the manner of Charles Darlington himself. But, unfortunately, these self-made men had not all picked up the social graces of Charles Darlington, nor had they picked up such a wife as his. They were likely to talk "railroad" of an evening, and to yawn a good deal when any other subject was brought up. It was not a society, therefore, in which Mrs. Darlington found great pleasure, and she probably appeared in it less often than was her privilege; certainly less often than her husband. Consequently, when she did go out, she found that her husband knew the officials and their wives a great deal better than she knew them, — a fact not especially gratifying to her.

With her babies, though, there came a change. Maternity was strong in her, and she willingly sunk her life in her little ones. Darlington sometimes complained that she gave them too much of her time. He loved them, too, in his way, but their heads were nearly level

with his shoulders before he fully awoke to his fatherhood. He then devoted himself to them with the same ardor which characterized him in business. He took on the new life which children bring to their parents as their greatest, highest gift. He loved to study their different temperaments, and to make glowing prophecies based thereon.

Without discriminating against the others, he especially loved Carol. Her little shrewdnesses and girlish cynicisms, her early practicality, delighted him. From the time she was fifteen, he had always talked, only half-jestingly, of making a railroad president out of her some day. In like manner the mother had turned to Herbert, a manly, affectionate boy, not as keen as might be, but with a heart as soft as a woman's, and an unsailable honesty. Here in Ashboro, where they were presumably settled for life, these same parental preferences continued to prevail, and were understood and returned by the respective children without any unlovely partisanship in the family.

The adolescence and maturity of the children wrought one other change in the parents. The caresses and little womanly dotings which Mrs. Darlington once lavished on her husband were now lavished on her only son, who seemed to need them more, and to care for them more. At least, he repaid them in kind, which Charles Darlington did not. Yet Mrs. Darlington's allegiance to her husband never wavered. She was as ready as ever to praise him, soothe him, cheer him; she listened to his "schemes" — when he confided them to her instead of to Carol — as sympathetically as though his ambition were but the counterpart of hers; she was as proud of him as ever; and compared

him with other women's husbands only to be still prouder.

{ This steady, unimpassioned love of a middle-aged woman, which neither asks reward nor expects it, which is given as a flower gives its fragrance, is perhaps the divinest thing this side of heaven. }

CHAPTER X

A PHANTOM OF THE NIGHT

"I DON'T know whether your father will like this shade of red or not," observed Mrs. Darlington, holding the tie out for Carol's inspection. "It's pretty bright."

"When did you ever know anything to be too bright for papa?" asked Carol, looking off the newspaper she had picked up. "Where is he to-night?"

"Is n't there a directors' meeting?"

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten. There is some trouble about the right-of-way of the new switch. Old Mrs. Eldridge owns a little triangular plat of ground next to Smithson's warehouse, and the new track cuts off the point of it. She won't sell or rent perpetually for any reasonable sum, and I suppose we'll have to start condemnation proceedings. The part we want is too narrow to build a lemonade-stand on, and is utterly useless to her. If there was ever a case where old age is a stumbling-block in the path of progress, as Mr. Whitson said last Sunday, that is it."

Ruth lifted her eyes from her book, and flashed Carol a glance of hearty sympathy. Mrs. Darlington answered, after a pause: "She does seem to get on the wrong side of everything; but I presume she thinks she's right. She's old, and lives up there all alone, and I think she fancies everybody is trying to cheat her out

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of her money. Her own children have, and that's enough to embitter anybody."

"Oh, she has cause enough for her crankiness, I suppose," answered Carol, with a slight yawn. "But that does n't make it any less annoying. I think she could qualify perfectly for the Better Dead Club."

"I would n't speak in that way, though," said her mother.

"It is n't kind — or very ladylike, I suppose," admitted Carol, laying down her paper and watching her mother work. "But she's such a stingy, unpleasant, shrewish old person that I can't think of her with patience."

"I wonder what John is doing now," said Mrs. Darlington, presently.

"I understand he is going to get married," answered Carol, with a sarcastic smile. "He's out of work, and he can't bleed his mother any longer; so I suppose he has to do something."

"I feel sorry for the girl," put in Ruth.

"I don't," said Carol, decidedly.

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Darlington.

"I don't know; some girl in Huxford. She must know what he is, and I think she is marrying him on account of his prospects. John will inherit about fifty thousand, if the old lady does n't cut him off."

"I feel still sorrier for her, if that's the case," said Mrs. Darlington. "If she loved him, she could put up with his weaknesses, in a way. But if she's marrying for money —" She paused to observe her work, and did not finish the sentence. "I wonder if I have n't got this too narrow, after all," said she, comparing her work with one of Mr. Darlington's ready-made ties.

Carol glanced at it, but said nothing. She was not an authority on fancy-work.

"Hold it up, mamma," said Ruth, from her book. "That's all right. They tie easier when they are narrow."

For a few minutes the silence was broken only by the ticking of the clock and the charring of the coal in the grate. Ruth was again buried in her book. Carol's eyes floated over the paper, stopping at a headline here and there; but her mind continually reverted to Mrs. Burbanks's case. Her conscience did not prick her so sharply now, but her thoughts had a melancholy tinge. Kaltenborn's expression at her grand fiasco, as she chose to think it, also irritated her in the recollection.

"Has Cash's sister come yet?" asked Mrs. Darlington. She put the question without pausing in her work, but there was a subtle change in her voice which the years had taught Carol to recognize as indicating disapprobation.

"I don't know," she answered. "I suppose not. He did n't say anything about it."

"Shall you call on her?"

Ruth, for all her oblivion, raised her head, and gave Carol a sly, comical look.

"Why, certainly, mamma," answered Carol. "Why should n't I? It would n't be very complimentary to Cash if I did n't."

"Of course, if you are invited up, you will have to go," admitted Mrs. Darlington.

"I shall have to go whether I'm invited or not, mamma. It's just as incumbent upon me to call, under the circumstances, as though I had been invited."

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"I don't like your running up to that hotel, that's all," answered her mother.

"I won't run there much," said Carol.

"It would be a poor return for Cash's attentions if you did n't go there while his sister is here," said Ruth, with a roguish look. She knew just about how welcome Mr. Winter's attentions were to her sister, and she knew also the effect this remark would have on her mother, who had lived twenty-seven years in a joking family without learning how to take a joke.

"I fancy Carol has made him about all the return she makes other young men who call here," spoke up Mrs. Darlington.

"You must be getting a good deal of sense out of that book, Ruth," observed Carol, dryly.

"I don't know whether that's enough or not, mamma," said Ruth, ignoring Carol's thrust.

"Ruth, will you stop?" demanded Carol, authoritatively.

Ruth turned to her book with a smile, and Mrs. Darlington also was silent. Again the only sound in the room was the palpitations of the nervous little clock that squatted on a highly ornamental bracket fixed to the wall. Outside all was still save for the soft respirations of the new electric-light plant, which ran till twelve o'clock. From where Carol sat she could see two or three illuminated windows in the office-building, where the directors were holding their late session. With these exceptions, the town was asleep.

Yet not quite. A faint, distant halloo floated into the room. The girls kept on reading, but Mrs. Darlington's fingers came to a rest. She lifted her head in a listening attitude, and then glanced at Carol. The latter

not looking up, the mother resumed her work after a moment, but still retained an attentive posture.

Soon the halloo was repeated, this time nearer, and more like a cry of distress. Mrs. Darlington threw up her head, like an alarmed deer, her back rigidly straight, her eyes gleaming. The girls still read on. Their mother glanced from one to the other, and their tranquil mien again reassured her, for she relaxed a little. But as she did so the cry was once more repeated, still nearer, three times in close succession.

"Carol, did you hear that?" demanded Mrs. Darlington, quickly.

"Yes. It's probably a crowd of boys," answered Carol, carelessly, but she shifted the paper to hide her face, which had suddenly grown as white as marble. Ruth also looked up, alarmed. Mrs. Darlington laid her work down hurriedly, and noiselessly slipped into the front room, where the windows commanded a view of the sloping street leading down toward the business part of the town.

For a moment all was quiet again, and the color was beginning to return to Carol's face when a series of fierce yells, not a block away, rent the air. They apparently proceeded from a man crazy drunk. Mrs. Darlington suddenly re-appeared in the doorway, with a white face. "Carol!" she moaned, sinking into a chair, with her hands pressed tightly against her face.

Carol quickly rose, retaining her paper in her hand. She was still pale to the lips, but they were set firmly, and her eyes shone with determination. At this demonstration on her sister's part, Ruth dropped her book to the floor, and sprang up, with a lively terror on her face.

"Stay right where you are!" commanded Carol of the girl. "I can take care of him, mamma. Don't fret!"

She drew to the sliding-doors connecting with the front room, and also those opening into the hall; then leaning against the latter, she waited, with her hands tightly clasped together. Mrs. Darlington did not change her stricken, bowed attitude; she might have been in prayer. Ruth began to sob. Carol glanced from one to the other, but at that moment she was far above grief herself. She was strung for sterner work.

The cries outside, as they slowly approached nearer and nearer, grew more like those of a maniac than of a drunken man. They were not mere incoherent sounds. The most piteous pleadings, the most awful threats, and blood-curdling blasphemies followed one another with furious vehemence. There was no break in the breathless harangue; the torrent flowed steadily, though sometimes sinking to unintelligible mutterings, sometimes rising to shrieks of impotent rage. Then the noise of scuffling feet on the sidewalk became audible to the motionless listeners inside, and the sounds of conflict — grunts, sharp exclamations, labored breathing, and muffled blows.

The hideous commotion halted directly in front of the house for a moment, and next the trampling was transferred from the public board-walk to the Darlington's tiled walk. Next it struck the front steps, where it raged worse than ever for a little, and then suddenly subsided.

"I wish your father was here!" murmured Mrs. Darlington, helplessly.

Without answering, Carol opened the door she had been leaning against, stepped out into the hall, and closed the door behind her. Upon reaching the double front doors, she stood irresolute and afraid for a moment, with her hand upon the knob. Then she threw the doors wide open, letting a broad flood of light out into the night.

Ashboro's one public night-watchman, uniformed at the expense of the H. P., R., A., and S., stood on the doorstep, panting, with the perspiration running down his face. His cap was jammed over his eyes. He held, in a grip of iron, tight against his huge chest, a struggling, kicking, screaming, biting, hatless, coatless thing. The latter's hair streamed down over his forehead into a pair of wild, maniacal eyes, giving him somewhat the appearance of an idiot. His clothes, such as were left upon him, were ripped and torn and shredded until he bore a vague resemblance to a rag-bag. None but an intimate would have recognized in this uncouth and terrifying wretch the neat, manly, soft-spoken Herbert Darlington.

"I will take him," said Carol, firmly.

"He's pretty bad to-night, Miss Darl'n'ton," gasped the policeman, doubtfully eyeing the slender arms she extended.

"I will take him," Carol repeated.

After another moment of hesitation, the officer cautiously released his victim. He had no sooner done so than the unfortunate youth, recognizing neither home nor sister in his delirium, aimed a blow at Carol which, had it struck her fairly, would have felled her to the floor. His aim was poor, however, and she received only a glancing touch on the shoulder, yet heavy enough

to make her reel and strike the wall. With a cry of execration, the burly officer sprang forward, and again pinned Herbert's arms to his side.

"Can you carry him upstairs, Mr. Ryan?" asked Carol, still calm.

"I've done it more than once," he answered, with pardonable pride. But before the feat was accomplished this time, the banisters bore more than one dent and scratch. Carol led the way down the hall, threw open the door to Bert's room, and flashed on the electric light. Promptly, and without direction from Carol, the officer threw his captive upon the bed by main force, and coolly deposited his own huge bulk across the prostrate man's knees. With one hand he pinioned Bert's wrists together upon his chest; the other he closed with no gentle pressure around his throat, shutting off the appalling noise. Then, and then only, did the miserable victim cease his revilings, while he still glared at his captor with the glittering, vengeful eyes of a throttled brute.

Carol made no remonstrance against these heroic measures. As cool as her brawny coadjutor himself, she stepped back and opened the drawer of a chiffonier. After a moment she advanced with a little shining instrument between the fingers and thumb of her right hand. Bert's shirt-sleeves were so torn that there was no need to push them up to get at the flesh of his forearm. With fingers that trembled slightly, she inserted the needle-like point of the hypodermic syringe under his skin, and gave the piston a steady, slow pressure with her thumb, sending the benumbing morphine into his wildly coursing blood.

It was ten minutes, though, before the officer re-

moved his weight from Bert's knees, and another five before he released his grip. In the meantime he talked, not with forced volubility, on some irrelevant theme, but with well-timed pauses, on the matter in hand. He told Carol where he had found Bert — in sole possession of a low grog-shop, from which the youth had expelled proprietor and customers. He kindly estimated for her the damages Bert had done there, including a plate-glass front next door; and thought they would not be more than half of what they had been the time before. He compared Bert's case with similar cases he had known or heard of, and said that it beat his time; he could not understand these periodical — spells. He could understand easy enough how a man could take a drink *every* day, or twenty times a day. He had done it himself, once. But this other!

Carol stood at the foot of the bed, leaning lightly against it, and watched the drug do its subtle work. Her pallor had given way to a feverish flush. She listened in an abstracted way to the policeman's ramblings, but was conscious of being soothed by his strong, vibrant voice. When Bert's lids had slowly closed in the unnatural slumber produced by the opiate, she got a blanket and spread it over him. The burly blue-coat meanwhile, standing aside, made a pretence of adjusting his tie, which had gotten askew in the affray, and of brushing some dust from his sleeves. He also be-thought him to take off his cap, which he did, exposing a bald spot on the top of his head, though his hair curled thickly elsewhere.

"Well, I guess that's all," said he, cheerfully, as they stepped out into the hall.

"Yes, I guess that's all," answered Carol. When

they reached the front door, she gave him her hand, and said, with a little grateful smile, "Good-night, Mr. Ryan!" As his thick hand closed around her slim fingers and his head came down in a heavy bow, there could be little doubt about his having been compensated for his pains.

Carol went back to the sitting-room, and sat down beside her mother, who was staring into the fire with tearless, vacant eyes. The daughter took her hand, but said nothing. There was nothing to say. All that could be said had been already said, over and over again, for Bert had been brought home in this sad plight many times before. Yet the shock was unusually severe to-night. He had held out for six months this time, — the longest he had ever gone since his first fall; and the family had begun to believe that at last he had downed his old enemy for good. Only a few nights before, Mrs. Darlington had returned thanks, in her bedside prayer, for the strength which had been allowed Herbert in the months gone by. And now —

She could not bear to carry her retrospection further. Yet in that moment of family shame and disgrace, her love and sympathy went out most strongly to the unfortunate author himself of all the evil. She knew that the chastener Remorse was even then heating his cruel though beneficent irons, to burn once more the already scarified bosom of her dear boy. She knew how those irons would hurt as his flesh shrivelled under the consuming touch; and she knew how he would set his teeth, in his solitude, and bear his fearful punishment like a man.

While a student at Princeton, on a lark in New York City, Bert Darlington took his first drink. The spree

which followed amazed and terrified his companions. The gentle youth suddenly became an irresponsible, destructive, homicidal maniac. He danced, shouted, and swore; he broke the water pitcher over the head of one of his comrades, and hurled the bowl at another; he smashed pictures, punched out the window-lights, threw bedding and furniture out of the hotel window into the street below, and finally, in a most appalling fit of frenzy, blindly gashed the walls with his knife.

His companions, scarcely tipsy themselves — for little had been drunk — fled in terror, locking the door behind them. For an hour the imprisoned youth rendered the night hideous with his infuriated yells; then, finishing the whiskey his friends had left behind, he fell into a stupor. He was saved from a night in jail only by the solemn asseverations of his companions to a policeman that he was suffering from a temporary fit of insanity, to which, they alleged, he was subject.

Thus sprang into being, in a moment as it were, the devil which henceforth was to give Herbert Darlington no peace; which was to degrade him at will; which, with a wave of its ugly cloven hoof, was to make of him a destructive, murderous, unnatural fiend, knowing no restraint, and sparing neither friendship, innocence, purity, nor the sacred ties of blood, — a devil which had since stalked through the Darlington household day and night, sat at table with their guests, and held a place in the family circle; which threatened, at last, its tortured victim's life.

Bert's next "drunk" — so people called it — followed four months later. In the intervening time he had not tasted a drop of liquor, or craved it. The same excesses marked this spree that had marked his first

one, and he was expelled from college. Since that time, at periods from one to five months apart, he had continued to fall. Violence did not always appear in the first stages. Sometimes there was a preliminary mood of cunning, when he dissembled, with no motive whatever, and with an art that he never knew in his sober moments. Again, though rarely, this preliminary mood was convivial. He would then wander around singing and making speeches, sometimes straying far out into the country, either alone or with the first companion that presented himself.

His recoveries were accompanied by the most excruciating mental sufferings. Sometimes he took to his bed; when the attack was less severe, he had been known to walk the floor of his room for twelve hours at a stretch. He once told an intimate he did not believe he would be punished in the hereafter for his drinking, because he did not believe that God would put a man in hell twice for the same sin. Some people were impressed by this remark — it leaked out in some way — and were fond of repeating it whenever Bert's lapses from sobriety were under discussion; others regarded it merely as a weakness. Doubtless he was weak, somewhere.

The anguish of remorse was always followed by a deep melancholy, lasting several weeks. During these periods he excluded himself from the society of all save a few chosen friends. To these few he had, on several occasions, hinted at suicide; but as one attack followed another with no such disastrous consequences, this dark threat came to be classed with his other weaknesses. With these exceptions, Bert was cheerful and happy; and in spite of his many failures to overcome his ab-

normal appetite, he never lost faith in himself for any length of time.

Just what effect his great weakness had on his social position, it is hard to say. Youth, a winning personality, an accomplished and beautiful sister, a respected family, and wealth are social props not easily knocked from under one. Most people doubtless believed that he would never reform; most mothers had doubtless warned their daughters against him — possibly with a sigh of regret. Certainly old man Clifford had warned his grand-daughter, Elsie, against him.

But Bert Darlington was a pleasant fellow — pleasant to talk with, and pleasant to waltz with. It was pleasant to ride behind his blooded horses; it was pleasant, in company with a crowd of young people, to glide over the rails of the H. P., R., A., and S., in the president's private car, with a supper or a theatre party at the other end of the route; it was pleasant to be invited to the Darlington home. (And pleasant things are not renounced by society without a powerful motive. All said and done, whatever the parental pillow-talk may have been about Bert in those homes containing marriageable daughters, his social position was envied by most of the young men in Ashboro.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAIL OF THE PHANTOM

"DID you cover him up?" asked Mrs. Darlington, in a voice tremulously tender.

"Yes," answered Carol. Her voice sounded strangely apathetic in comparison with her mother's; and it was apathetic, in fact, just then. Carol's was one of those natures which the first fires of tribulation and the first hammer-strokes of destiny only harden.

"Oh, child, it seems too bad!" exclaimed the mother, with a little whimper. "It seems as if all the poor boy's struggles and all my prayers —" She broke off, and bit her lip, while her face worked spasmodically.

"It *is* too bad!" said Carol passionately, her delicate nostrils inflating after the manner of her father's. "But what is done can't be undone. You are not to blame, and I am not to blame. *We* did n't drink the vile poison, and we have done all we could to keep Bert from drinking it. I sympathize with him — just as much as you do; but I am not going to let his weakness pull me down. I am not going to accept the shame and disgrace. I am not going to worry myself into an early grave, or mope around the house like a ghost, or — or lose any sleep."

"He can't help it either, dear," said Mrs. Darlington, very tenderly. "He suffers more than we do. You know that he does n't *want* to disgrace us all, or ruin

his health, or make such a —" Her words were again lost in the fulness of her heart.

"I know that he can't help it," answered Carol, more charitably. "But if he can't, who can? We can't. We have done all we could. And if Bert is going to—to ruin himself for life—if it's got to come to that—I am not going to let it ruin me too. And you sha'n't let it ruin you, mamma. He won't be the first man that has done it, or the last. It is not a world-catastrophe that we must bow before. People won't let us excuse it on any such grounds. They—" She closed her lips on her mounting indignation.

"God's ways are inscrutable," said Mrs. Darlington, after a little silence. "I never could understand why an innocent child should be born with such an appetite."

"I would n't blame God, mamma," said Carol.

Ruth shook her head at her sister with a deprecatory frown, and Carol relapsed into a silence which was not broken for some time.

"You had better go to bed, girls," said Mrs. Darlington at last, looking up with dull, sick eyes.

"All right, though I don't know what for," answered Carol, obediently rising.

"You said you weren't going to lose any sleep," said Ruth, with a faint smile.

"I say lots of things. Good-night." Carol bent and gave her mother a kiss.

"Good-night, Carol. You must try to sleep, dear. You won't be fit for work to-morrow if you don't."

"Good-night, mamma dear," said Ruth, and Carol noted with a pang how much softer her sister's face was than her own must have been.

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"Good-night, Ruth," said her mother. "Don't leave your window up too far to-night. It will be colder before morning. And you had better put an extra blanket on your bed."

"Mamma can't see these things just as you do, sis," said Ruth, as she and Carol ascended the broad staircase, side by side. "There's no use arguing with her, especially at a time like this."

"Yes, ma'am," said Carol, with mock humility. But after she was ready for bed she put on a pair of slippers and a loose gown, and went noiselessly downstairs again. Her mother had apparently not moved, and still sat looking into the fire. Carol fumbled around the table, the mantel-piece, and the secretary, as if hunting for something, until her mother looked up, and asked, "What is it, Carol?"

"Nothing — only I thought I had left my little scissors down here. Never mind, mamma!" said she, as her mother made a motion to rise. "They must be upstairs. Good-night once more." The girl's lithe figure bent over the back of her mother's chair, the two bronze heads again came together, and this time they lingered longer and more lovingly, it seemed, than before. "Now *you* go to bed," said Carol, playfully patting one of her mother's cheeks, and holding her own downy cheek against the other.

"I think I'll wait until your father comes," answered Mrs. Darlington. "He can't be much longer. I could n't sleep anyhow till he comes. Probably we had better have breakfast a little later in the morning. Good-night. Just look in and see how Ruth's windows are. She has a little cold."

If C. A. Darlington could have seen Carol playing

through this little scene, — thrilled with love and touched with remorse for her unfeeling remarks about her brother, and yet reined up by a pride that would not let her bow her head and openly beg her mother's forgiveness, — he would have seen the re-incarnation, in fairer form, of his own proud spirit. Her hunting for those scissors that were never lost, and her stopping, as though incidentally, to kiss her mother a second good-night, were but another form of the half-atonement he himself had made many a time in the past.

Carol went upstairs a second time, feeling better, though not satisfied. *She* knew. After glancing at Ruth's windows, she stepped into Bert's room to look after the ventilation there. His deathlike, breathless, dreamless sleep had held him motionless. His hands lay on his chest just where the grip of the officer had left them, and the blanket she had thrown over him lay as unruffled as a shroud. His face, naturally so fair, was dark and sodden. His hair, still straggling over his forehead, gave him an unnatural, low-browed appearance.

Taking a comb from the dressing-table, Carol combed out the still form's tangled hair, and parted it in the middle, and brushed it to glossy smoothness. This simple change made a wonderful improvement. Locked as he was in the immovable embrace of the drug, he now had a childish, innocent expression. Four or five purple places and as many scratches on his face completed the effect, just as though he might have received them in rough, boyish play. Carol bent over and kissed one of the bruises ; then kneeling by the bedside, with her face on his pillow, she let her long-suppressed grief have its way.

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Charles Darlington came home about half-past twelve. He let himself in with a night-key, and came down the hall with a light, brisk step. It was his usual step, with something added, and his wife instinctively knew that everything had gone well at the directors' meeting.

"Hello! You up yet?" he exclaimed cheerily, as he stepped into the room, his inevitable cigar in his mouth. "About bed-time, is n't it?"

"I thought I'd wait for you," answered his wife.

"Where 's the *Tribune*?" he asked, shuffling the papers about on the stand, and frowning good-naturedly at their dates. "I suppose Carol's lugged it off upstairs. No — take it all back. I want to just glance it over for a minute."

As he unfolded and folded the paper to get at the first page, the crow's-feet around his eyes deepened into a smile. "You knew Clint Windom's nephew was here from Cincinnati, did n't you — Black's his name? He 's in the creamery business; owns a dozen or more creameries around the country, and was thinking, so Clint said, of starting one here. He even went so far as to look up a location, and his eye fell on that little piece of land next to Smithson's warehouse, that old lady Eldridge owns. I don't know as you know just where it is."

"The one there 's some trouble about, in connection with the new switch?" said Mrs. Darlington, dreading to make her revelation.

"There *was* some trouble," said Darlington, genially. "Black went up to see her, and told her what he wanted the land for. The old lady is n't in her dotage yet, and seemed to think that he did n't want it for creamery purposes. I don't know whether she knew he was Clint's nephew or not. Anyway, she held out for eighteen

hundred, the same price she asked us for it. It's worth about eight hundred. Well, they haggled along for several days, and finally this young fellow, Black, went to her, and told her that the deal was off; that he could n't take the ground at any price, as he understood the railroad had decided to run its new switch around the other way, in by Ford's. We did' talk about it, you know. Well, that piece of land has been a white elephant on the old lady's hands for some years, and that scared her. She dropped to a thousand in one break, and closed the deal at nine hundred. To-night Clint walked in and threw the deed on the table, and told us we could have the land for nine-fifty, — the fifty to pay Black for his trouble. So the switch will go in by Smithson's, after all."

Darlington waited for his wife to say something; she usually did say something about these "deals" that could not be measured with a perfectly straight yardstick. But to his surprise, and possibly gratification, she said nothing this time. While he was debating with himself whether he had better make the transaction a little clearer to her or not, she said, "Charles, Bert is sick again."

Darlington stiffened a little, like a man who had been suddenly impaled on a lance, and looked sharply at his wife. Then he lifted his paper with a quick gesture, looked at it with a dark brow, and as quickly lowered it again.

"You mean he's drunk," said he, stung into harshness. She made no answer, and his bright eyes flitted restlessly about for a moment. It was evident that he too was suffering, in his way.

"Who took care of him?" he asked.

"Carol did. And the officer."

"Ryan?"

"Yes."

"How bad was he?" he asked, after another pause.

For answer Mrs. Darlington suddenly placed her elbow on the table, opposite him, and clasped her hand tightly over her eyes, the muscles of her face working nervously. Even in that crucial moment Darlington noticed that it was still a beautiful hand. He looked at her gravely, and after a while, as she continued to struggle silently with her emotion, his face softened.

"It don't do any good to cry, Winnie," said he, with a kind of brisk tenderness. "It don't do any good to do anything that I know of," he added, bitterly. "He has everything under the sun to live for that any boy ever had, and if that won't keep him straight —" He broke off hopelessly.

"He held out so long this time," she murmured huskily.

"Yes," assented Darlington. "Which is a very good reason why he should have held out still longer — for all time. If he overcame his appetite once, he can do it again, if he *will*. But I know how it is with Bert. After a fight or two, he lets down. After the thing gets a little dull in his memory, and his remorse is gone, and people have about forgotten it, he begins to think it was n't so bad, after all. I know it," he repeated, emphatically, as his wife incredulously shook her head. "I have watched the thing time and again. I — When that boy was born," he exclaimed, in a transport of grief, "I little thought that you were adding a drunkard to the world!"

"Oh, Charles, he is n't a drunkard!" cried Mrs. Darlington, in her anguish.

"That's just what *he* thinks, Winnie," said Darlington,

sternly. "He deludes himself with the belief that he is suffering from a disease. He fancies he is the victim of a monstrous appetite that no human power can cope with. He tells himself that his case is different from any other ever known. He believes that other people think that way too, and will excuse him on that ground. There's just where the trouble comes in, and as long as he palliates his offence by such reasoning, he will continue to fall, as sure as there is a God in heaven.

"I don't doubt that he has an abnormal appetite, as the term goes," he continued, more temperately, after this burst. "I know where he got it. He got it through me, from his grandfather, though I was never tipsy in my life, and never cared a fig for all the liquor ever made. I am willing to make every allowance for that. It was born in him, and he could n't help it. But the same thing has been born in thousands of other men, and they have overcome it. What others have done, he ought to be able to do. If he can't, there is something wrong with him. And I tell you, Winnie," he continued, grimly, "this getting crazy drunk every few months will put him down, in the end, just as effectually as though he lay in the gutters every night. The only difference is, the agony will be drawn out. How long do you suppose he could hold a job anywhere else? How long do you suppose I would tolerate such conduct in any other employé of the road? Not one minute!"

"I know it, I know it," she answered piteously. "But what can we do? What can he do? He tries, Charles, he tries so hard. He suffers more than we do. You know that. He suffers on his own account and on ours. It seems to strike him down without one moment's warning. He was never in better spirits than to-night,

hypocrite
—

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and no power can make me believe that he had a thought of taking a drink then."

"I don't know what we can do," answered her husband, gloomily. "God knows I have done everything a father could do. I have talked with him, pleaded with him, reasoned with him. If he goes to the dogs, I can't help it."

"I have sometimes thought if we could get him into the church," Mrs. Darlington began, and then paused. Darlington's face was as impassive as an Indian's.

"The church is a good thing, for some people," said he, briefly. "But it does n't furnish backbone."

"If we could get him in," she continued, with a faint note of hope, "he would be committed to a different life. He would be pledged before others to overcome his weakness; and outside of the real good it would do him, — the change of heart he would get, — it would be a moral support."

"More so than his family?" her husband asked, sceptically.

"He would have both then," she answered. "And I believe, Charles," she added, looking at him most earnestly, yet with a certain timidity, "that Christ's promises are not in vain. I believe that He *will* help those who give themselves fully and unreservedly to him, and will lend them a strength that they have not in themselves."

"Well, I'm willing to try it," said Darlington, not unkindly. "I am willing to try anything that holds out hope, no matter how remote."

He had absolutely no faith in the saving power of the church for himself, but he had suspected more than once that it might be able to do something for Bert. He

knew that the church did a good deal for some people. He had his own way of explaining that good, to be sure — a way that the doctors of the church would have been very loath to accept ; and he knew that it would never work in that way in his case. But this was neither here nor there with regard to Bert, as he willingly acknowledged.

"Will you help me, Charlie?" Mrs. Darlington asked. It was the first time she had called him Charlie for years. That and the girlish timidity with which she made the request carried him back to the days of her young wifehood.

"Now look here, Winifred," he began, tenderly, "you know I can't do that. You know it would be mere hypocrisy for me to teach religion to Bert, when I am not in the church myself. He would —"

"You *could* be in yourself," she interrupted, sweetly.

"No, I could n't," he answered, kindly but firmly. "Not believing as I do. You know all about that. But you go ahead. You are in, and you can do it conscientiously. And it may do him good — I don't know. All men are not built alike. What is of no use to me may be of great use to him, and it won't do any harm to try it, anyway."

"I have tried it," said she, plaintively.

"Well, try again. Don't let a few failures discourage you. And Carol will help you. She is in."

"Yes, she's in," assented Mrs. Darlington, slowly.

"And she's as good as any that are in," her husband added, as if denying her doubtful tone.

"Yes, she's good," she repeated, tenderly.

"You get her to help you," he said again, encouragingly. "She can get Bert into the church if anybody can."

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"It is n't only a question of getting him *in*," ventured Mrs. Darlington, "but of a change of heart—a conversion."

"Well, Carol can help you in that, too, can't she?"

"Yes, I think she can," Mrs. Darlington returned, very slowly. After a moment she added, "Carol is not as spiritual as Ruth is, I'm afraid; and she is n't the church-worker that Ruth will be."

Darlington said nothing. At another time he might have argued the matter of Carol's spirituality. After a silence of some length, he said, "Well, let's go to bed."

"You go," said she, drawing her chair a little nearer the fire. "I will be up after a little."

He made a motion to remonstrate, but evidently thought better of it, and bending over the back of her chair, he kissed her good-night, — a little mark of affection that he too often dispensed with.

She sat there alone in the fire-light for two hours, with no company but the busy little clock. About three, she noiselessly replenished the fire. Shortly afterward she dropped off into a doze, but immediately awoke with a start. Evidently she had been dreaming. This process she repeated until she would not allow her lids to close again. Aside from the clock and the soft charring of the cannel coal, the only sounds were those mysterious noises that float about big houses in the dead of night. Then came a more familiar noise, like shuffling footsteps. Looking up, she saw her husband, in dressing-gown and slippers, standing in the doorway.

"Winnie, you must come to bed," said he. "It's after three, and you will simply be sick to-morrow. And I can't get to sleep without you."

"All right," said she, obediently. "Go on up, and I'll be right along."

She followed him almost immediately, but before she went into her own room she stepped into Bert's. He had not moved since Carol left him, evidently. She tucked the blanket around him tighter, kissed him on the forehead, lowered the sash a little, and softly closed his door.

"Is that you, mamma?" came Carol's voice, through her open door.

"Yes. Are n't you asleep?"

"Have n't you been to bed?" came the voice again, reprovingly.

"Yes, dear, I am just going," the mother answered. The next moment she was at Carol's bedside. "Are your covers all right?" she asked, feeling around Carol's shoulders in the dark.

"It's *your* covers that are worrying me," answered Carol.

"Good-night."

About six o'clock in the morning, just at break of day, and before the earliest servant in the Darlington household was astir, Mrs. Darlington slipped from her sleepless bed, and again looked into Herbert's room. He was pacing the floor in his stocking-feet and tattered shirt-sleeves, with his hands in his pockets. In the dim, chilly light he presented a wild and haggard picture. He looked stooped and hollow-chested, and his eyes were the washed-out gray of an octogenarian's. At sight of his mother he paused, and then folded her to his bosom.

"Oh, mother — mother — mother!" he moaned.

"My poor, poor, *poor* little boy!" she murmured.

They stood motionless and silent for a moment, and

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then she slipped from his arms, and turned down his bed, and got out his gown.

"Now you must go to bed and to sleep," said she, cheerily.

"I wish I could sleep, mother, — forever!" he answered, desperately.

After she had gone he locked his door; but it was ten o'clock, with the bright sun trying to peep in at his curtained windows, before he threw himself upon the bed, exhausted, and fell into a fitful slumber.

CHAPTER XII

“BECAUSE I LOVE HIM!”

BERT did not leave his room until summoned to dinner at six o'clock. He then went down dressed with scrupulous care in a black suit, which, in connection with his pale face and subdued manner, gave him something of a clerical air. No reference whatever was made at the table to the events of the night before. A light and somewhat perfunctory conversation was carried on by the women. Mr. Darlington was silent for the most part, but occasionally exchanged some “shop” remarks with Carol. A question was occasionally referred to Bert by the girls or his mother, which he answered briefly and without lifting his eyes. His expression was rather haughty, but it was plain enough that he was suffering.

Finally Mr. Darlington said in his off-hand way, “Old Miller was in to-day, Bert, to see about two car-loads of lime that are hung up somewhere along the line. I told him he would have to come in to-morrow and see you. Know anything about it?” His manner and tone conveyed perhaps the slightest reflection on Bert's absence from the office. But Bert's nerves were in a very bad condition, and he answered sharply, —

“I told him yesterday that there had been a mistake in the billing, and that the cars had been dropped out

at Rankelman. They probably came in on 36 this afternoon."

"All right," said his father, suavely.

"It seems to me it would be an economical move to make a change in the High Point agency," observed Carol. "That man Avery's careless re-billing costs the road more than his salary."

"I don't think it was Avery's fault," Bert answered, shortly. "The cars were consigned by the Western Lime and Salt Company, and I have n't a doubt that the error lies with them. They have made the same mistake before, consigning stuff to Miller's branch yard in Rankelman instead of sending it here."

"I should sooner think it was Avery's fault," returned Carol.

"Avery is as good an agent as we have," answered Bert. "The trouble with him is, he's over-worked. He's short of help."

"He'd have help enough, if he hired the right kind," said Mr. Darlington, with an air of finality.

Bert, however, did not so accept it. "What's his pay-roll a month, Carol?" he asked.

"About four hundred and ninety dollars," she answered, after a moment's thought.

"And what was it three years ago?"

"I don't know. That was before my time."

"It was about the same, for there has been no change in the number of men in that office since I can remember. Yet the re-billing there has increased in the last three years fully fifty per cent."

"He ought to ask for more help, then," said the president, lightly.

"We ought to give it to him if he needs it," said

Carol. "It's our loss, not his. But if an agent needs help and is too timid to ask for it, it does n't seem to me that he's the man for the place."

"If he needs help, we will give it to him," returned her father. "There is no use in talking about a new man there. Avery is the most popular man in High Point, and can smooth more ruffled fur in an hour than any two men I know of. Further, he's been with the road too long to be dropped."

With this the discussion ended. Bert got up from the table a little before the others, and returned to his room. He emerged again about eight o'clock, and left the house. As he walked slowly up street, into the residence part of the town, he met several people whom he knew; but as they were not readily recognizable in the dark, he used that as an excuse for not speaking. In the middle of the third block above his home, he turned in where a plain, two-story house stood back some distance from the street, from which it was screened by a tangle of shrubbery. A light shone from the front windows, which might have indicated that he was expected. The quickness with which his ring was answered was also significant.

Elsie Clifford came to the door. At her low, happy, "Hello, Bert!" accompanied by both her outstretched hands, the gloom lifted from his face. She had not heard! But the respite was only momentary, and as he followed her into the parlor, darkness again settled over him.

An aged couple sat in the adjoining room, half-hidden by a pair of old-fashioned portières. The old lady was busily knitting close to a light on the centre-table; the old man sat drowsing, with his feet on the fender of the

base-burner, his hands clasped before him. Neither of them looked up at the young man's entrance; which might have had no significance — for the young people were hardly in the old people's presence — had not Elsie slipped up to Bert, and resting one hand upon his shoulder in an endearing way, whispered something in his ear.

He at once stepped to the portières and respectfully saluted the venerable couple. Mrs. Clifford answered with a bright little nod and smile, as though she were more than willing to meet any advances; but the old man only returned a stiff “Good-evening, sir!” scarcely turning his head. Darlington flushed, and Elsie bit her lip and looked pained.

For an hour the young people carried on a fragmentary and unsatisfactory conversation. Not a sound came from the sitting-room, and everything said in the parlor must have been distinctly audible to the grandparents. Bert obviously chafed under the restraint, and to relieve this in a measure Elsie brought out some samples of dress goods she had received from the city. She asked him to pick out what he thought the prettiest pattern. He did so with the quickness of a woman. Her choice had fallen on another pattern, but after some discussion and hesitation and comparison, she decided to order from the piece he had chosen.

About nine o'clock the old people turned down the lamp and went off to bed. Elsie was softly playing on the piano at the moment. She gave Bert a gratified smile over her shoulder, but kept on playing until she heard the bedroom door upstairs close with a bang that indicated finality. Bert by this time was standing by Elsie's side. She jumped up and took his hands in

hers. Holding them straight down by his side, she tip-toed a little, and lightly kissed him.

"How are you, dear?" she asked, as if he had just come.

As she stood, her eyes were about even with his chin. Very remarkable eyes they were, too. Splintered points of light shot hither and thither in their midnight depths. Their size and roundness, and their peculiar fixity of gaze, gave them a wide-open, alert appearance, not exactly pleasant at first to most people, — it was too hysterical, they said, — but very likely to grow upon one, as Bert Darlington had found. Indeed, to most people who knew her well, Elsie Clifford's unusual eyes were her finest charm. Her mouth was of a part with her eyes, drooping sensitively at the corners, and constantly playing under her emotions.

"I am not very well," answered Bert.

"Is that why you did n't stop after choir practice for me last night?" she asked, with playful incredulity.

"Yes, that's the reason," said he, soberly.

"Why, you are not sick, Bert, — are you?" she asked, seriously.

"I am. Sick at heart," he answered, a ghostly smile flickering over his face. He pressed her head to his shoulder, so that the searching, alarmed eyes could not look into his face, and said, wearily, "I fell again last night."

She stiffened in his arms at first, and then, for what seemed a long time, did not move or speak. At last she slowly removed his arms, and sat down a little way off, with her back toward him. She dropped her head upon her hand, and she might have been either silently crying or only thinking.

Darlington also sank into a chair, languidly and wearily. He attempted no defence, for all defence had long since been exhausted. He did not even attempt to soothe her. All he could do was to suffer, and let her suffer. He rocked gently, with his eyes upon her stricken figure, as an assassin might look at the victim of his knife. Never had he loved her more ; never had he felt a profounder pity for her ; never had he felt a profounder disgust for himself.

After a while, though, this extreme self-loathing passed. She sat so long and so still that the thought came over him once, in his morbid condition, that she might be dead. But this fear soon passed, and after a moment he said, in a low tone, “Elsie !”

She made no answer, and he waited five minutes.

“Elsie !” he repeated. Still no answer, and again he waited.

“Can’t you say something — even if it is only to tell me to go ?”

“Let me think,” said she, without moving.

He waited ten minutes more, perhaps, — it seemed an hour, — and then said, rising : “Elsie, please speak. I can stand anything better than this terrible silence. I can’t stand that ; and if you *must* think, I’ll go home and let you think alone.”

“Go,” said she.

But he did not, and no power could have made him do so. He waited again, and when a second time he could stand it no longer — when it seemed as if he must cry out from sheer nervousness — he went over to her, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and said, appealingly, —

“For Heaven’s sake, Elsie, say something !”

"Don't touch me!" she commanded. "Sit down and let me think. I want to think."

The deepest abasement has its bottom, and Bert had reached the bottom of his. The manner in which she flung off his hand cut him to the quick, and stalking haughtily back to his chair, he said angrily: "Think it over from now till to-morrow morning. I won't disturb you again."

It seemed as though she was going to take his advice, for she made no further movement. He lit a cigar, and smoked fast and furiously, keeping a hot coal glowing that spoiled the fragrance of the weed, though he was in no condition to be fastidious. When the cigar was finished — in about ten minutes — he lit another one. This was about half consumed when Elsie arose. Her eyes were hot and dry, her face was white and drawn.

"Grandfather said once that you would probably kill your wife in a fit of drunken insanity," she began, in an unnaturally hard tone, and paused.

"He may be right," answered Bert, gloomily.

"He said that you once tried to kill the bar-tender in the Hollenbeck House, and that you would have done so if help had not arrived."

"They say I did," he assented, dully.

"Because he had refused you a drink," she continued.

"Yes."

"When he was trying to save you from further degradation."

"Yes."

"When you are that way you don't know anybody, grandfather says."

Bert made no answer.

"Is it true?" she asked.

“Yes.”

“Suppose I were your wife, and you were to come home that way, and I should refuse you a drink. What would you do?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” he groaned. “But I would not hurt you. I could not hurt *you*. Not a woman, and one I loved.”

“Did n’t you ever hurt a woman, or attempt to?” she asked, her severity relenting a little.

“Yes,” he answered, desperately.

“She was n’t a woman, either, was she? Only a girl, was n’t she?”

“Yes.”

“If you would try to hurt one woman, would n’t you try to hurt another? If you are so far lost, at these times, as to forget manliness, and even common humanity, would n’t you forget everything else — even love?”

“I don’t know,” he murmured, hopelessly.

Another period of silence followed, during which Elsie studied his half-averted face with eyes so earnest, so penetrating, that their gaze might have reached his soul.

“If you were a woman, would you marry such a man as you have confessed yourself to be?” she asked.

“That is hard!” he protested.

“Hard!” she exclaimed, with a note of indignation.

“It’s a question that I must answer.”

“I would not,” said he, quickly, in answer.

“And you would not ask me to do anything you would not do yourself?”

“No, no!” he exclaimed in his misery.

“Then you are willing to release me from any engagements I have made?” Her eyes filled with a saintly compassion.

"Not willing, but in justice I must."

She was silent again, composed, sad, and subdued.

"Do you think I ought to trust you again?" she asked, gently.

"No," said he, uncompromisingly.

"Do you think, if I did, that I should meet with the same disappointments that I have in the past?"

"Elsie, I don't know," said he, brokenly. "I have exhausted promises. I have sworn by everything I hold sacred to be strong, and yet I have been weak. I can't make any more promises. I *won't* make any more. It would simply be mockery."

"Do you mean you are not going to try any more?" she asked, in a low, frightened tone.

"No, I am going to try. But I am not going to make any more promises, for they bind you as well as me. You are free, Elsie, free as—" A lump in his throat choked off the rest. She looked at him with a great love in her eyes, but still maintained her impassiveness.

"If I should try you again, do you think I could retain my self-respect?" she asked, very kindly. "Is n't there a point where love becomes mere infatuation, and as such is shameless? Dare a woman marry a man out of pity, either for him or herself?"

"No," said he, emphatically. "If you did that, you would be doing me as much injustice as yourself. But as to losing your self-respect—I am not so sure about that. If a man were all right except for one weakness, I don't see where your self-respect would suffer by waiting for him to overcome that weakness. The Bible says it is divine to forgive, and your waiting for a man would in a sense be forgiveness. I don't see how it could

hurt your self-respect. But self-respect is n't the only thing to be considered,” he added, gloomily.

Without warning, Elsie pressed her handkerchief to her face and began to cry, softly, almost noiselessly. Bert watched her with his own eyes moist.

“I thought of this plan,” he began, hesitatingly, after a pause. “We will let things stand as they are now, — you released from all your obligations, and I released from mine. I make no promises; you make nothing contingent on any performance of mine. We are both free. But if at the end of a year I have lived a sober life, and if you are then still — still of the same mind — ”

“If I love you, say,” she broke in, sobbingly.

“—if you still love me, perhaps you would feel assured then of my ability to overcome this terrible habit. Mind, I don't ask you to wait. You can leave town, if you want to, and go back to the hospital and nurse; but if you *should* wait— ”

He could add nothing. Her answer was a long time coming, but it fully satisfied him when it did come. “I will wait,” she said. “If you can hold out one year, you can hold out forever. And if you *can*, I know you *will*. Be strong, Herbert,” she admonished, with a trembling voice, “for your sisters' sake, for your parents' sake, for my sake. Don't let such a miserable thing as whiskey dash all your hopes to the ground. You have so much to live for. I will pray for you, dear, and I have faith that it will help you; and you must pray for yourself. Pray with faith, and it will help you as it has helped so many others.”

At the door he paused with her fingers in one hand.

"Have I the right, now, under the new agreement?" he asked with a wan smile.

"You made it, Bert," she said, as if he ought to know; and his heart sank with love at her coy demeanor. The interpretation he put upon the agreement evidently pleased her, though she flushed a little, and said, "Now go, dear."

Elsie went upstairs, and sat down in a low chair with a leather writing-case on her lap. She wrote busily in her diary for ten minutes, and then went to bed, leaving her candle, which it was her whim to use instead of a lamp, on a chair close at hand. For an hour she lay on her back wide awake. Then she suddenly blew out the candle, turned over on her side, and went to sleep. She had decided to keep her grandparents no longer in ignorance of her true relations with Bert Darlington. She had decided, further, to tell them at once of his last spree. Report of the latter would come to their ears, anyhow, in the course of time.

The atmosphere of the breakfast-table was not encouraging. Her grandfather was unusually glum, and complained of not having slept well. He said something also about having heard the front door slam in the middle of the night, and Elsie did not think it necessary to explain that Bert had left before eleven o'clock, and that the front door had not slammed then. In spite of the unfavorable conditions, however, she waited for a period of silence, and then, in a tremulous voice, she told the old folks all.

A dead, ominous silence followed, in which the girl could hear her heart beat. Mrs. Clifford, whose existence had long since been lost in that of her husband,

waited in timidity for his fiat, giving Elsie little wondering, reproachful glances. Mr. Clifford, however, maintained a portentous calm for some moments, and continued to eat, with his eyes upon his plate. At last he shot an abrupt glance at Elsie.

“Is n’t it customary, in such matters, for the young man to ask the permission of the young woman’s guardian, before he marries her out of hand?” he asked, caustically.

“I suppose he will when the time comes,” she said, conciliatingly. “As matters stand now —”

“He will never get it!” thundered the old man, his anger suddenly bursting forth. “Never will I turn my son’s child over to that young reprobate! Never will I deliver her a sacrifice to a homicidal maniac! Marry him, if you will,” he ended, threateningly, “but let it be known to the world to be against your grandmother’s wishes and mine.”

“Then it must be so,” Elsie answered, softly.

“Oh, Elsie, I am afraid you will be unhappy!” exclaimed her grandmother.

“She can comfort herself with the thought that she is n’t the first,” said Mr. Clifford, dryly. “And she won’t be the last. Girls have married against the wishes of their parents ever since marriage was an institution, and I suppose they will until it goes out of date — and it probably will soon, at this rate. If you will make your own bed, don’t grumble at having to lie on it. We have done our best by you. We warned you against that man the first night he ever called. We might have set our foot down positively on his coming here then, but we did not. We might set it down now on this marriage, but we will not. We will not be arbitrary.

Marry him, if you will, but with the full knowledge that it is against the wishes of those who have always had your welfare at heart."

"I don't want to go against you, grandpa," answered Elsie, plaintively, "you and grandmother. But in this matter I must be judge. I know you have my interests at heart, but I know Bert better than you do, and what he is capable of. I know that he is as true a man as ever lived, and good enough, with that one exception, for the best woman that ever lived. I know that what you say about his drinking is true, and I will never marry him until he has overcome that weakness beyond a doubt."

"When will you know that?" asked her grandfather, astutely.

"When he has stopped for a year," she answered.

"And after you have given him yourself, what will you bribe him with for another year?"

"Now, Henry!" exclaimed his wife at this thrust. Elsie did not answer, but her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and her lips twitched.

"Do you know what people will say about your marriage?" continued the old man, but in a more kindly, argumentative tone. "They will say you married him for his money, and were willing to put up with his drinking for that."

"I don't care what they say," she answered, swallowing a hard place in her throat.

The old man was about to add something, when Elsie suddenly dropped her knife and fork, and hurried from the room.

"You are too hard on her, Henry," said Mrs. Clifford, sympathetically. "She has feelings on this subject that you can't understand."

“It’s all a pack of nonsense,” answered Mr. Clifford, impatiently. “I’m doing it all for her good. It’s the only way to bring her to her senses.”

“I don’t know as it’s the way to bring *her* to her senses,” returned his wife.

When the old man had taken his hat and stick for his usual morning walk, Mrs. Clifford went to the foot of the stairs, and called up to Elsie. No answer coming after repeated calls, the old lady slowly climbed the stairs and went into Elsie’s room. The girl was lying on the bed, her wet face buried in the pillow.

“You must n’t cry so, dear,” said the grandmother, soothingly. “And you must n’t think your grandfather harsh, because he means it all for the best. It’s only his way, and he loves you just as much as I do, but he thinks you are taking a very wrong step. I do, myself, dear. Just think of all the misery that drunkards have made in this world, and think of the poor girls who have died of broken hearts. They all persuaded themselves first, just as you have, that it would n’t be so in their case. They all thought that some special providence or good luck would take care of *them*.”

“You don’t need to argue that way, grandma,” answered Elsie, brokenly, but with spirit. “I know all that, and I shall never marry him until he has stopped, and until I know that he has stopped.”

“Suppose you wait a year, and he fails to stop,” suggested the old lady. Elsie made no answer, and her grandmother continued: “It will be harder to break off then than ever. The longer he comes here, the more he becomes a part of your life. You may go on this way giving him probations for years, only to find in the end that his case is hopeless. A girl has her

future to think of," she added, practically. "I don't like to appear mercenary, but you have reached a marriageable age, and—" She paused at an impatient movement from her granddaughter, and took another tack. "If he does stop, you don't know for how long it will be. It is a fearful risk. For all you know, and for all he knows, he might get drunk on your wedding day. Taking all this into consideration, daughter, why should you subject yourself to such a terrible hazard?"

"Because I love him!" cried the girl, passionately.

And the woman, septuagenarian though she was, was silent.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROBLEM'S SOLUTION

MRS. BURBANKS'S pension lay between Carol and her father for the next few days like an impassable barrier. With her brother's fall and the consequent suffering of the whole family still fresh in her mind, Carol was unusually tender and susceptible; and this estrangement from her father, impalpable and unacknowledged though it was, pained her sharply. Yet, put herself in her father's place as she might, shuffle the facts as she would, she could not escape the conclusion that an injustice was being done, and she believed in her heart that her father knew it too. As often as she got to this point, she felt like crying. Her allegiance to her father was very dear to her, and some subtle, evil force seemed now to be breaking that allegiance strand by strand.

Whether Darlington was conscious of doing an injustice or not, something was evidently out of harmony in him. He smoked more than usual—and he always smoked too much; he was taciturn to a degree that excited his wife's comment; and he was more or less irritable.

For two or three days Carol had resisted her better angel's promptings to open the Burbanks case once more with her father, and make a clean breast of her conflicting thoughts. One afternoon, while dictating to the

young girl who acted as her stenographer, the call came again in unmistakable terms. She had been unusually keen and cheerful that morning; but in a flash, as it were, the office seemed to grow cold and cheerless, her spirits sank, and she lost all heart for her work. Her inoffensive stenographer became almost odious to her, and then the Burbanks pension smote her like the memory of a crime. She dismissed her stenographer abruptly, and with tears of vexation laid her head on the desk. It was one of her first "battles royal" with conscience. It did not last long, for she quickly rose and walked into her father's office.

"Papa," she began, abruptly, "I think we ought to pay that pension, and Bert thinks so too. I have thought it all over, and I believe we ought to pay it."

"What pension?" asked her father, suavely, affecting not to notice her agitation.

"Mrs. Burbanks's," said she.

"How did you happen to think of that again?" he asked, curiously. "Seen Kaltenborn?"

"I have thought of little else since we had the matter up before," she answered, impetuously. "I don't know why I didn't say so, but it seemed to me then that we were doing her an injustice, and it has seemed more so ever since. I don't want to meddle with what belongs to your department, but it seems to me that this belongs to every department, and involves the whole future and welfare of the road. But whether it does or does not, papa, I had to tell you what I thought."

"Well, you know my rule," said Darlington, seriously. "I am no dictator. I believe that two heads are better than one, every time. And though I don't believe that pension ought to be paid, as I have often

said — that is, that justice requires it to be paid — still if you and Bert believe it ought to be paid, why, I am overruled, and that's all there is to it, and it will be paid."

"But don't you honestly think, papa," she began, in a voice rich with feeling, "that it ought to be paid?"

"It does n't make any difference what I think, Carol," he answered, gently. "When I gave you children your respective offices, I accepted you as counsellors. I gave you my confidence, and asked for yours. The property is as much yours as it is mine — some day it will be all yours — yours and Bert's and the rest. If you and Bert think that pension ought to be paid, it shall be paid, and that's the end of it."

Carol wrung her hands, wavering under the responsibility now that the step was before her. "I don't want you to do it just because I say so, papa," she said, tremulously. "I don't want you to put it all on *me*."

"Bert says so, does n't he?" asked Mr. Darlington.

"He thinks so, and he said so when I asked him about it, and I know he feels as strongly about it as I do. But —"

"But what?"

"If he has n't said anything to you about it — if he has n't thought enough about it to say something to you, I don't want you to assume that you are overruled."

"Suppose you call Bert in," he suggested, quietly.

When Bert had been called, and the matter had been stated to him, he answered with a confidence that won his sister's heart, —

"I think, father, that it ought to be paid. I have always thought so, and I always shall. I not only think

it is just, but I think it is expedient. I think that by paying it the road will be money ahead in the long run. I think that it will create a better feeling among the employes and with the public."

"And you, Carol?" asked her father, formally, as though in a directors' meeting.

"I say, pay it."

"Then pay it we will," said Mr. Darlington, conclusively, and turned to his desk as though the interview were over.

Carol lingered after Bert had gone. Now that the deed was done, she did not feel as happy about it as she had expected to feel.

"You don't care, papa, — do you — much?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Care! Why should I care?" But there was a slight intonation of injury in his voice. "I don't profess to be infallible. You and Bert ought to have just as good heads as mine. At least, I give you credit for it, and there are two of you, and only one of me."

"I don't think our two, though, are as good as your one, as a general thing," she answered, with an affectionate smile. "But this time, papa, I think it was a question of heart, maybe, as much as of head, and for that reason I feel that Bert and I are right. I wish I could make you feel that way, too," she ended, plaintively.

The president laid down his pen again, and slowly swung around in his chair. "My dear," he began, impressively, "there are two sides to every question. There is usually a good deal of right and a good deal of wrong on both sides. But the side that has one grain more of right than the other, is the right side,

and the side we ought to decide for. A grain, though, is hard to weigh, and not many of us have scales fitted for the work; so the only thing to do is to accept the weight of the greatest number of scales. When they say that the voice of the people is the voice of God, they mean the *most* people. The other day Mr. Kaltenborn said a good many true things. So did I. You believed most of what I said, and most of what he said, but you think now that he said more true things than I said. Maybe he did. And if you think so, and he thinks so, and Bert thinks so, we've got to say so, and act accordingly. But you see that I, myself, am not in a position to see it that way — could n't if I wanted to. I am biased. I have been pointing in a different way from Kaltenborn ever since I first saw the light. But don't for one minute suppose that I think any the less of you and Bert for what you believe. You can't help what you believe any more than I can help what I believe. And I don't think any the less of your judgment, either. I am just as likely to be wrong as you are. In fact, as I said before, the chances are against me in this case, for you are two to one."

Carol listened with thoughtful eyes. She arose, not just satisfied, apparently; nevertheless, she gave her father a tender, half-apologetic, caressing look, and said, —

"Papa, I'm awfully selfish! I want to have my own way without paying for it. I want to ride you down, and then have you say you like it and think I ought to have done it. I would n't do it either, if I were you."

She walked slowly toward the door, pausing to glance aimlessly at a letter lying on the table. A little further

on she picked a scrap of paper up from the floor. As she dropped it in the waste-basket, she moved a paper-weight an inch or two, and then glanced out of the window. She seemed loath to go — loath to leave her father unconvinced. He watched her curiously until her hand was finally on the door-knob.

"There's this, Carol," said he, as though continuing the conversation, and she stopped. "The machinery of the world is not so nicely adjusted yet but that friction is bound to occur now and then. There is a kind of world-wide injustice at work somewhere that nobody in particular is responsible for. You may say that is why Mrs. Burbanks and others are poor. Sometimes we seem to be helpless to correct this injustice. I have tried in this matter to be just to the interests intrusted to me, and yet it may be that that very justice involved injustice to somebody else — to Mrs. Burbanks. Of the two — the railroad and her — she is the least able to stand injustice. Looking at it in that light, if I had this thing all to do over again, from the beginning, and know what I know now," he continued, qualifying minutely, "I should decide as you have."

"I am so glad, papa!" exclaimed Carol, with beaming eyes.

She walked back to her room with a musing smile on her face. She knew just what that admission had cost her father. It made her happy, too, for it reinstated him in her unquestioning confidence, and called for her loyalty once more. When the stenographer re-entered, at Carol's ring, she glanced curiously and wonderingly at the now glowing face of the fair official, so recently clouded over.

Carol buttoned herself into her jacket after office

hours, peeped into the glass, tucked her hair back in one place, pulled it out in another, and then sallied out into the street. After reaching her home she kept on for three or four blocks, turned once or twice, and finally came to a halt on the doorstep of a little ivy-covered, stuccoed cottage. The walls were yellow with age and blotched with dampness ; the windows were small, high, and deeply set ; the door was surrounded by old-fashioned marginal lights. But altogether the place had a cozy, home-like appearance.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOMAN OF BUSINESS

THE Rev. Stephen Kaltenborn roomed and boarded in this house, and the object of Carol's call was to inform him of the railroad's action on Mrs. Burbanks's pension. But after she had been shown into a dark little parlor by the old lady who answered her ring, she half regretted her coming. It did not seem so urgent then as it had seemed an hour before that the Rev. Mr. Kaltenborn should know that the H. P., R., A., and S. had done justice. Indeed, in her revulsion of feeling—a revulsion which seemed quickened by the closeness of the little unfired room and an odor of furniture polish—Carol felt as if her errand was almost quixotic. Moreover, the fact that she had come in person when she might have written gave her now, in the ebb of her enthusiasm, a sense of vexation.

Yet her visit was really official, and in no wise a violation of any social convention; and, furthermore, a verbal communication of her news had some advantages over a written one. One of these advantages was the opportunity given Carol to set her father right in Kaltenborn's eyes, and it was just this thought which had moved her to come in person. But as she stood waiting before the fire, it seemed to her, in her changed mood, that any defence of her father was uncalled for and beneath her dignity.

Therefore, when Kaltenborn entered, buttoned to the throat in his Prince Albert, Carol's manner was conspicuously reserved. He seemed not to notice this, though, — he had a way of not noticing unpleasant things, Carol fancied guiltily, — and shook hands with her, gravely enough, and asked her to sit down. This she had previously decided not to do, but there was something subtly authoritative about his invitation, so that it could not be declined without a show of resistance, as it were. Hence Carol sank down tentatively upon the edge of a chair, somewhat with the appearance of a bird momentarily alighting.

She briefly told him that the railroad had decided to give Mrs. Burbanks a pension of one hundred dollars a year. Kaltenborn did not seem as glad as Carol had fancied her news would make him, and she half believed he was revenging himself for her reserved manner. His remarkable eyes merely brightened a little, and he thanked her as calmly as though the granting of the pension had been a matter of course. Carol could have bitten her lip in vexation as she compared his unruffled demeanor with her tears and heart-burnings over the subject.

On the other hand, though, Kaltenborn manifested no sense of triumph whatever, and in his comments tactfully avoided the personal equation. He spoke touchingly of Mrs. Burbanks's fortitude in her poverty, but obviously with no aim at effect. From Mrs. Burbanks's case to his relations with his parishioners generally was but a step, and on this subject he discoursed in the simplest, frankest manner imaginable. His language was good, his words flowed smoothly, and there was something very pleasing in his round, mellow tones, —

something indicative of reserved power. Almost against her will, Carol found herself becoming interested; the half-rebellious spirit within her died away, and she took a firmer position upon her chair. Finally, after a pause in the conversation, Kaltenborn looked at Carol in a distinctly personal way.

"If I may ask, how long have you been connected with the road, Miss Darlington?"

"About two years — ever since I came back from school. But before I went away to school I always loved to be around the offices."

"Then you like the work."

"Very much."

"About a year ago," said Kaltenborn, with a curious smile, "I read in a New York paper an account of a rather wonderful young woman who was auditor of a railroad."

Carol flushed slightly, but said nothing.

"The article was illustrated with the young woman's picture, but I don't believe I should have recognized you from it," he continued. "If I remember, the story gave your methods of work in detail, and characterized them as unique. It also named the colors you affected in dress, and your favorite author, and favorite flower. I forget what they were. I think, too, that it gave a list of your social accomplishments, and mentioned your hours of rising and retiring, and also a favorite horse of yours. Doubtless you saw the article yourself."

"Yes," confessed Carol, laughing, "and I must admit having that clipping tucked away with some of my other keepsakes. I don't know why, though," she added, frankly, "for I have never shown it to any one. When I first saw the paper, down at Whiting's, folded

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so that my picture showed, I was half ashamed of myself. I did n't hear the last of the matter from my father for six months."

"Then you were interviewed?" smiled Kaltenborn.

"I suppose you would call it that," she said. "At least a young man came into my office, and gave me his card, and said he was representing a New York daily. At first I supposed he wanted to write the road up. It is a rather unusual road, in some ways, you know. We talked only a few minutes, and I did n't tell him one-quarter of what he put in. From the way he made me talk in that article people must have thought I was a grand egotist." She broke out into a little laugh at the recollection. "To think of your having read that!" she added, curiously.

"And doubtless he bribed the photographer for your picture," said Kaltenborn, amiably.

"No," she laughed again, "I weakly gave him that. My father was responsible for that. I did n't really want to give it, but my father said I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"Don't you get tired of going down to the office every day, regularly, whether you feel like it or not?" asked Kaltenborn, thoughtfully, after a moment.

"No. I have my bad days, of course."

"I suppose the distinction it confers upon you is some compensation," he observed, with a touch of humor.

"I presume so," she admitted, smiling.

"And you like the contact it gives you with a world that most women know nothing of—the business world?"

"I do," she returned. She suspected that this cate-

chism was being made in a critical rather than an inquisitive spirit; and she was not surprised, therefore, when he asked, —

“Don’t you ever feel that contact with men in a purely business way, where chivalry can have no part, takes something away from you — disillusions you, as it were?”

“My experience is,” she returned, promptly, “that very few men lay aside their chivalry with a woman even in business.”

“Well, even at that, don’t you feel sometimes as though you were steering your bark through dangerous rapids, when you might be floating on placid waters?”

“I can’t say that I ever have,” she answered. “If I had, I should have landed, or gotten back into placid waters, for I don’t think my spirit is adventurous.”

Kaltenborn smiled approvingly. “I am glad to hear you say that,” he said. “Don’t let your business spoil you, if you must be in business. It has spoiled many a man, and, so far as I have observed, it is doubly fatal to women. Don’t make the mistake of thinking you have to be one person in the office and another at home or in society. Business is one of the most heavily laden scapegoats on earth. The multitude of little meannesses done in the name of business — the number of soul-shrivelling bargains driven, is astounding, if one only stops to think. Legality seems to be the test of justice — as though laws were perfect! But something more than even justice is required in business. Don’t you know that you could run that railroad all your life and never do one unjust deed, and yet die with a soul warped out of all semblance to the grand thing God meant it to be?”

"Oh, I know it," said Carol, not just relishing his preaching. "But I think being in the office has done me good. I think it has broadened me. I think a little business experience would help every woman. You learn that it doesn't pay to stick too much for trifles, where larger things are involved. I will give you men credit for having a kind of immensity about you that we women have n't."

"If that were only all that women learn in business!" he exclaimed, regretfully.

"I see that you don't approve of women being in business," she laughed.

"I don't," he answered, slowly, after a second. "I believe that woman has a higher, holier work than grinding out dividends on investments. I have been preaching to you," he interpolated, with a half smile. "So I will now use a parable, with your permission." He leaned back in his chair, and folded his hands in a cozy way. Under this influence Carol herself settled more comfortably into her chair, and prepared to listen.

"My father," he began, "once owned a beautiful Arabian mare. She ran away once, unfortunately, and was never safe to drive again; in fact, she could not be driven at all, but would make a dash the moment her head was turned loose. A horse-trainer, after trying everything else, thought she might be cured by breaking her spirit, as he called it, and to that end she was hitched to a stone wagon, with three heavy draught-horses. Untrained to the work, the mare fretted herself continually; she made many an impatient plunge that never budged the load an inch, and after it was started she was always wasting her strength by trying to go too fast. Altogether she probably gave about half the

service of an ordinary draught-horse. Her wonderful speed, her spirit and endurance, which would have kept her going on the track until she dropped dead, and which were the result of generations of careful breeding, all went for nothing. She left no track record behind, and did nothing to develop further those characteristics she possessed to such a high degree. At last she threw herself and broke her leg, and had to be shot."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Darlington, thinking more of the horse than of the parable.

"A woman in business always reminds me of that mare," Kaltenborn went on. "Her unfortunate running away may be likened to the misfortunes which usually force women into business. The rest of the analogy is plain."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Darlington, drawing a long breath, but looking very hopeful, "if I believed the cases were analogous, I should n't rest until my resignation was in. But I think you take us business women too seriously," she added, lightly. "You men have a habit of doing that wherever women are concerned. We don't take ourselves very seriously, I believe,—in business, you know. We are just masquerading, most of us. I'll admit we like to scare you men a little. And of course, once in a while one of us *does* go wrong, and makes up her mind that marriage is a failure, and all that. But not often." She looked at him whimsically out of her shrewd eyes.

"Then you don't expect to be an auditor always," he said, smiling.

"I did n't say that," she retorted — rather prettily. "I don't know what I expect."

"Don't you expect to be married?"

"I don't know about that, either. I belong to the sex which stands and waits," she added, subtly.

"I don't imagine that you would have to stand and wait very long," he ventured with his dry humor.

"That would depend somewhat, I presume, upon what I was waiting for," she returned, gracefully.

Her swinging, fresh, whole-souled manner, coupled with the humor that shimmered in her eyes and nestled in the corners of her mouth, compelled Kaltenborn's admiration, and he openly acknowledged it with a smile.

"Those things usually adjust themselves, don't you think?" he asked with grave drollery.

"Not always," she ventured.

"No, not always," he admitted, looking at her steadily. He evidently concluded that she might have had something personal in mind, for he added, "I have never married myself for the reason that I have never found the right woman standing and waiting. But that's my fault, I suppose, not the women's."

"That's gallant, I am sure," she said. "But I should think," she continued, daringly, "that a wife would be almost a necessity to a preacher."

"She is. A preacher needs three things primarily: a wife, a library, and a pulpit lamp," said Kaltenborn, drolly.

He was certainly improving, and Carol laughed. "That's a rather doubtful compliment, but I cannot doubt your intent. You don't mean, though, of course, that a minister should marry just to get an assistant, no matter how valuable she might be."

"I suspect they sometimes do," he answered, quite calmly.

"Why, Mr. Kaltenborn!" she exclaimed. "*You* would n't?"

"No, I would n't. But, conversely, I should feel it my duty not to marry any woman who would not prove a good assistant."

"Would n't that be about the same thing?" asked Carol, doubtfully.

"How?" he asked.

"If you married a woman just because she could assist you, that would be wrong, of course, — as we just said."

"Yes."

"And if you refused to marry her just because she could *not* assist you, would n't that be wrong too?"

"How?"

"Why," she exclaimed at his provoking calm, "because you love her and she loves you. All requirements for a happy marriage have been met. That's just such a marriage as we say is made in heaven. You don't mean to say it would be right to break it off just because you happened to be a preacher and she happened to know nothing about theology?"

"Theology is n't —"

"Well, then," she broke in, anticipating his objection, "just because she was n't much of a hand at visiting the sick, or leading prayer-meetings, or doing anything of that sort. Preaching is nothing but a business, in the sense we are considering it." She paused for any objection to her classification, but he answered, —

"That's all. But I should n't advise any man to marry a woman who could n't help him in his business."

"Oh, that's absurd, Mr. Kaltenborn, — pardon me!"

she exclaimed, thoroughly in earnest. "Suppose a man were an astronomer! What on earth could a woman know about that business?"

"She could be of considerable help, without knowing anything about the business," he answered. "Let me put my principle a little differently. I would n't advise any man to marry a woman who would be a detriment to his business. And if she was n't a help, I fancy she'd be a detriment. There's no neutral ground. I would n't advise it, because such a woman would impair a man's usefulness. Life is a unit; a man is a whole man, not part husband and part astronomer; and a woman marries the astronomer as much as she marries the lover. More, she's likely to find out before she gets through."

Carol looked into the fire a little dolefully, and was silent for a moment. "It seems to me that is a kind of man's view," she complained. "It does n't take the woman into account at all."

"Why, yes, it does," said Kaltenborn, sympathetically regarding her sober face. "If a man's usefulness is impaired by his wife,—if she is out of sympathy with his work,—it is very likely to make him unhappy; and he will inevitably visit that unhappiness upon her, in turn. My rule would save her from that fate. Besides, the rule works both ways. I should advise no woman to marry a man who would interfere with her work,—and she need n't be in an office to have a work."

"Well, I don't know," she exclaimed, favoring him with a little unsatisfied grimace, and patting her knee with her pocket-book. "I'm out of arguments, but I can't believe that. Suppose a man loved a woman so that he could n't do without her—if that is n't too

romantic for you," she interjected, in lighter vein. "Suppose he could n't do his work without her, though he knew he could n't do it as well with her as he had done it before he met her!"

"That's a pretty bad case," answered Kaltenborn, his lazy eyes lighting. "I think marriage would probably be the best thing for him, provided he could n't get a new backbone somewhere."

"You don't think much of that kind of a man, I see."

"No, not much," he smiled.

"But it's the kind of woman that you men all want, — one that thinks you are the only real desirable thing in the world."

"Not quite that bad," he protested.

She arose with a laugh, and said, with an air of chiding: "I'm afraid you are cold-blooded. I used to think I was, but I'm — I'm tropical by the side of you."

As she passed out of the gate, though, she said to herself that he was far from cold-blooded. In fact, she suspected that he had a hot head that was capable of getting him into any amount of trouble. He had ideas of his own, too, which usually means more or less trouble ahead, she reflected. So pronouncedly were these ideas his own that she fancied some people would call him a crank.

Kaltenborn did not at once return to his study, but sat looking into the fire, with his lips slightly pursed. A faint essence hung in the air. It was not perfume. At least, if it was, — and in sober sense he knew it was, — it had been individualized by the alchemy of Carol Darlington's person. It was no longer violet, or crab-apple blossom, or whatever else it might once have been. It was *she*.

Ten years before, a woman like Carol Darlington, he

reflected, would have stirred him wonderfully. He might possibly have wanted to marry her, for in those days he was looking for a wife. But now,— he smiled half sadly. In the quiet and solitude of that little dark parlor he could warm up this girl's image in his fancy, and quicken his pulse a trifle. But she herself, in the flesh, had not been able to do it ; nay, should she return at that moment, her presence would rout his pleasing fancy. That was why he smiled half sadly, and called himself a dreamer.

A dark object on the floor, close to the chair Miss Darlington had occupied, finally attracted his attention. It was her glove ! He looked at it for some time, coldly and philosophically, before he picked it up and laid it across his knee. It still retained the shape of the delicate hand of the wearer. The thumb, though, was a little out of joint, and he straightened that. Next he laid his own broad, thick hand alongside the dainty pattern, and over it, and on it. Then he smiled.

How much of woman's story her glove tells ! How it hints of velvety skin, of exquisitely moulded members, of fragile bones ! How it clings to one's hand, and shrinks, and folds itself together so modestly ! He slipped two of his fingers into the glove. They seemed to fill the space her whole hand would occupy, and he smiled still again,— not sadly this time, but tenderly. Then he withdrew his fingers, as though they were guilty of profanation, and smoothed their trace away.

The door-latch clicked, and the Rev. Mr. Kaltenborn hastily concealed the glove in the inside pocket of his Prince Albert, in a rather unclerical way, and looked up at the intruder with a mild, questioning face. It was Mrs. Hicks, his landlady and a member of his flock.

"That was Miss Darl'n'ton that was just here, was n't it?" she asked, with a slight cough which seemed affected. She sank into the chair recently occupied by Kaltenborn's visitor, and smoothed out her apron with well-feigned carelessness.

"It was," answered Kaltenborn, dryly.

"I thought so, but I was n't sure. I ain't seen much of her of late years. She's been away to school, and since she come back, she's shut up in that office a good deal of the time. I guess she's pretty faithful at that."

"I believe so," answered Kaltenborn, blankly.

"It's a wonder she did n't drive up. You seen that horse of her'n, ain't you? They say it cost fifteen hundred dollars. It don't seem, though, that a horse *could* be worth that much. And if it was, it don't seem as though anybody could be foolish enough to pay that much fur it."

"They do, though," observed Kaltenborn, without attempting to straighten out her economics.

"They race him on the track every fair time," she continued, affably. "They did this last fall, just before you came, and he won considerable money, I'm told."

Kaltenborn said nothing to this, and after a moment she ventured: "It never seemed right to me for people who belong to a church, and profess to be Christians, to be racin' horses for money. Still, I always held, and always will, that the Episcopalian church, takin' it through and through, ain't but little better than a side-show. They give card-parties and dancin'-parties right in their house, too," — she, presumably, meant the Darlingtons, — "and I understand that Carol lets some of the young men smoke that go there to see her. Effie Vincent, that used to work there, told me that herself. 'T ain't to be

wondered at either, the way her father smokes. I never seen that man in my life without a cigar in his mouth. You've heard about her brother Bert, ain't you?"

Kaltenborn had not, and he was forced to listen to a detailed and somewhat fanciful account of Herbert Darlington's sins against sobriety. Again he refrained from comment; but not so much this time to express his disapprobation of the old woman's gossip as because he felt saddened. He was thinking of the trial a dissolute brother—for such he pictured Bert, from Mrs. Hicks's account—must be to such a proud, high-spirited girl as Carol Darlington.

"I suppose they find their justification," continued Mrs. Hicks, impartially. "But it's different from the way I was taught to serve the Lord. And when they take their father's private car, and carry a party of young people over to High Point, a hundred miles away, on *prayer-meeting night*, to see an opera, with a lot of shameless hussies in *tights*, I say there ain't no authority in *my Bible* for it."

She raised her head challengingly, and the hatred she bore the Darlingtons shone venomously from her eyes. Doubtless, too, she instinctively recognized in the man before her, preacher though he was, a toleration of these things which stirred her jealousy.

"I know they was in *tights*,—the actresses,—for I seen the disgustin' pictures myself in Will Harrison's barber-shop; and though I never meddled over-much with Mr. Hicks's business when he was with me, if he'd 'a' been alive then, I'll warrant he'd have never shaved again in Will Harrison's shop, which he did for twelve years steady, barrin' the last six months, when he was too weak to get out."

Kaltenborn seemed embarrassed for a moment, at the close of this harangue, and looked as though he would like to still maintain his silence. However, he said : " I, of course, advise against theatre-going, for the discipline of our church forbids it. As to the essential wrong in it, I am not prepared to say. Some plays are good, I am convinced, while I am just as thoroughly convinced that others are bad. As to the violation of conscience, that is largely a matter of education — of early training and environment."

" Mr. Collins put it stronger than that. He preached a sermon on it the next Sunday night." (Mr. Collins was Kaltenborn's predecessor.) " He announced his subject in the paper that week, and the house was packed. I guess Carol Darl'n'ton's ears must have burned that night. She did n't carry off any of our young people, of course, for they don't move in her set ; but Mr. Collins said, in the beginning, that he was there to preach to all men. Of course the *Intelligencer* did n't publish a word of it ; old Nichols is bound body and soul to C. A. Darl'n'ton, because they 're both Republicans, and he gets their printin'. But the *Visitor*, over at Munson, published a column of it. They say Mr. Darl'n'ton openly threatened to slap Mr. Collins's face ; but Mr. Collins went right down to his office, and he denied every word of it. I won't say that he did say it, but Mr. Collins told me himself that he never heard such blasphemous language from a *gentleman* in his life. Yet people profess to respect the Darl'n'tons. I don't know why it is, unless it's because they 're so handy with their money. That don't influence *me*. I never say nothin' against them, of course. They go their way, and I go mine, and I s'pose we 're both satisfied.

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But I can't help *thinkin'*. And they ain't stingy — I will say that for them. I suppose Carol brought you a five-hundred-dollar check for the poor, or sunthin'," she added, artfully, with a mirthless chuckle at her joke.

"No," said Kaltenborn, rising, determined not to satisfy her curiosity.

At that moment it struck him that, if Miss Darlington should return for her glove, it would place him in a rather delicate situation. The thought may have hastened his departure for his study. As he walked down the hall, and his mind reverted to his conversation with the young woman about wives and their capacity for helping their husbands, he fancied himself introducing Miss Darlington to Mrs. Hicks as his wife and co-laborer. The picture provoked a smile.

The next day he walked down to the H. P., R., A., and S. offices, with Miss Darlington's glove in his pocket. At the foot of the stairs he halted and turned half-way round, as though in doubt. While he was standing thus, Tommy Scrutcheons, the office-boy, came down the stairs.

"Take that up to Miss Darlington, please," said Kaltenborn.

Without a word the boy took the glove, turned around, and whistled his way back upstairs, tossing Carol's property from one dirty hand to the other, over his shoulder, after the manner of a juggler. Kaltenborn watched him until he disappeared, and then strode away.

CHAPTER XV

TICKETS AND CHRYSANTHEMUMS

CAROL briefly announced at the dinner-table, with some inward trepidation, that she had notified Mr. Kaltenborn personally of their action on the pension.

"Could n't you have dropped him a letter?" her father asked, carelessly.

"I could," she answered, "but my notification was n't exactly official — and I was up that way."

"What were you doing up there?" asked Ruth, idly.

"I don't want him to get the idea that we are anxious about it, that's all," said Mr. Darlington, before Carol had to answer Ruth's query, and with that the subject was dropped.

Carol and three girl friends — one of whom was Miss Blumenthal, she of the daring costume at the public reception and the guest of one of the girls — took a drive into the country a few days later. For the excursion Carol used the family carriage and a pair of powerful blacks, which, from their uncertain temper, had been dubbed "Nip" and "Tuck." Nobody ever drove the iron-mouthed creatures except Carol and Herbert, for Mr. Darlington was no lover of horses, and Mrs. Darlington was afraid of them. Carol was really the only one who found any pleasure in handling the pair.

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Their tremendous power, with its element of danger, fascinated her; and it was her delight to swing them around corners, or guide them safely through the tangle of farmers' teams in Main Street on a Saturday afternoon, or to bring them up prancing and snorting when they grew too high-spirited. Neither Bert nor her father, when either happened to be with her on such occasions, ever thought of offering her any assistance. She would have resented it if they had.

The drive ended with an inspection of the H. P., R., A., and S. shops. The master mechanic himself, after calling a shopman to watch the horses, led the way; and the girls trooped along behind, daintily screening their dresses from the omnipresent grease and oil, and tip-toeing around castings, through steel filings and moulding-sand. From the shops they walked over to the round-house, half a block away. A locomotive had just been housed and was still under steam. Two wipers were at work upon her, while a portly man in overalls, with a tight-fitting cap drawn over his closely cropped head, stood by, pipe in mouth, and watched them work.

"May I run her out to the tank and back, Mr. Reagan?" asked Carol, with a venturesome light in her eyes.

"I don't know why you should n't, Miss Darlington, as long as your paw ain't around," answered the engineer, with a good-natured smile; and, one after another, he swung the young women to the high step of the cab.

"My! I never knew how big an engine was before!" exclaimed Miss Blumenthal, looking with awe at the end of the boiler, with its intricacy of cocks, water-glasses, and levers. "No wonder it can *pull*. Do you

know how to work all those things? Have you ever run one before?" she demanded of Carol, doubtfully.

"Well, once or twice," answered Carol, boastfully, as she climbed up on the engineer's leather-covered seat, and tucked her skirts out of harm's way. Two of the girls mounted excitedly and half-fearfully to the fireman's seat.

"Well, for goodness' sake, don't let it get away!" exclaimed Miss Blumenthal, who preferred to stand, presumably in case it became necessary to jump.

"A locomotive is a *she*, Rose, not an *it*," explained Carol, with a covert laugh, as she threw forward the reverse lever.

"An Amazon, then," retorted Rose, with bated breath and sparkling eyes, as Carol laid a gloved hand upon the throttle and cautiously pulled it partly open. With sharp, long-drawn hisses — Carol had opened the cylinder-cocks — the ponderous machine jarred forward at a snail's pace, rumbled over the quaking turn-table, quickened its speed a trifle, — Miss Blumenthal gasped, — and then slowed down and stopped at the water-tank, a few rods further on. Carol reversed the lever dexterously, turned in the steam again, and they started back.

"I have n't breathed since I got up there!" declared Miss Dane, as Reagan lifted her down.

"I was deathly afraid a spring or something would break, and let all the steam out, or in, or whatever makes it go, and send us all to destruction!" cried Miss Blumenthal. "I mean, whatever makes *her* go," she corrected, slyly.

"You girls must have lots of faith in me," complained Carol. "And you would all make fine men, especially engineers. Imagine yourselves in that cab at midnight

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— a driving rain — chances for a washout — pitchy dark — able to see about forty feet ahead — three or four hundred souls behind you, all in your hands — and nothing between you and death except a score or more of forty-dollar-a-month switchmen, who may or may not be sober !” She turned and gave the engineer a kind of fraternal glance.

He nodded approval. “I could n’t tell the story better myself,” he answered.

When Carol was again in the carriage, pulling on the mouths of Nip and Tuck, she said, laughing : “Reagan looked immensely heroic under that panegyric of mine, and he *is* ; but as a matter of fact, he ’s a poor engineer. He worked in the shops too long. He ’s too much of a mechanic. He knows too much about the delicate parts of a locomotive, and he won’t *push* her. If he ever gets behind time, he ’ll stay there, nine times out of ten, to the end of the run. You see, he knows the delicate parts of an engine ; he ’s afraid something will break. If he had never been in the shops, he would n’t have that fear ; and to be a good engineer, you ’ve got to take chances on something breaking.”

engineer

“How do you know so much about it, my dear ?” demanded Rose, pertly.

“Because my papa has told me !” laughed Carol, with a grimace.

As the carriage rumbled down a smooth, shady street, Carol saw ahead on the sidewalk a man who attracted her attention, not so much by his size as by the muscularity of his movements. She almost immediately recognized the figure as Kaltenborn’s. He was coming toward them, plowing along with the momentum, apparently, of a steamboat. She was conscious, for per-

haps the twentieth time in her brief acquaintance with him, of noting that he did not look like a preacher, or indeed any other professional man. There was a lack of suavity. Nor did he look like a merchant — there was a lack of spruceness, or deference, or something else. He looked like a man interested in mining-stock, she fancied, — smiling at the idea, — or canals, or something else that she had only the haziest knowledge of.

She was just on the point of bowing to him when one of the horses stumbled, and she was conscious an instant later of having turned her eyes from Kaltenborn without acknowledging his unmistakable glance of recognition. At the same instant the wind whisked her handkerchief off her lap and out of the carriage. She saw Kaltenborn leave the sidewalk, and a moment later he came deliberately up with the handkerchief in his hand. Carol half turned, with an exclamation of thanks on her lips, — a little more profuse than she would have made it under other circumstances, — and partly extended her hand. Kaltenborn seemed not to notice the movement, for he lifted his hat and placed the handkerchief in the hands of Miss Blumenthal, who occupied the back seat. She exclaimed, with her ready vivacity, "Oh, thank you, sir! You are very kind!"

Carol was ashamed of her childishness, but for some reason she felt vexed at Kaltenborn's oversight, and she gave the horses a sharp cluck that sent them dancing on.

"Who is *he*?" asked Rose, coquettishly. "I have never seen him before. If I had met him in Berlin, I should have set him down, off-hand, for a German baron."

"He's a preacher," answered Carol, her good-humor not quite recovered. "What is there baronial about him?"

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"Why," cried Rose, "that Bismarckian valor, those blood-and-iron eyes, and that sublime indifference. We did n't move him any more than a bevy of tots out with their nurses."

After letting the girls out at their respective places, Carol walked the horses homeward. The thought had crossed her mind that possibly there had been some method in Kaltenborn's returning her handkerchief to Miss Blumenthal. She wondered if he had been absurd enough to take offence at her apparent slight. She smiled at the idea. No one who knew her, no one in her "set," would have dreamed of doubting her breeding so easily ; but this man with his revolutionary notions ! Well, he did not know her, was all she would allow herself to think — except that very likely he was of a sensitive nature. Altogether, she was sorry the thing had happened. But it really did not matter. She might not meet him again for months, if ever, except in the street. Still, she would rather have his good than his ill opinion.

She did meet him again, though, a week later. One of her ticket-checkers, a young woman who lived out five miles on the line, and rode to and from her work daily on the cars, had been sick for several weeks. Her reports and tickets were in such shape, necessarily, that none of the other checkers could straighten them out. The first of the month approaching, when Carol's tabulated statements of the month's business were due, she one afternoon ordered the whole mass of accumulated material bundled up, and drove out to Clifton in a single-seated buggy drawn by the two blacks. No stretches of sand could retard *them*, which was hardly the case with Whitefoot.

She found the girl sitting up, close to a stove, and carefully wrapped against any possible draughts. She might have shivered at her visitor's entrance, for Carol swept into the stuffy sick-room like a puff of fresh air, with her tawny hair, blown around her temples, looking a shade lighter by contrast with her wind-flushed cheeks.

She dropped her bundle of tickets on the floor just inside the door, as she entered, and sat down. The closeness of the room at once oppressed her, and she began to unbutton her jacket. The mother of the girl stood back timidly, half-awed, even before she knew who Carol was, by that indefinable possession which marked the visitor as belonging to another world. When the girl introduced the two, the older woman extended a thin, toil-worn hand, in a hesitating way, and glanced at her daughter, — apparently to ascertain the propriety of the act.

"I am glad to see you up, Lizzie," said Carol, cordially. "Have you been very sick?"

"I'm a great deal better, thank you," answered the girl, with a flush of pleasure on her pale face. "I hope to go to work Monday. The doctor says I ought not, for another week; but I know, if I get to work, I'll improve faster. I'm so restless here all day."

"She's been frettin' about losin' her place, if she stayed away too long," interrupted the mother, with a smile meant to express the absurdity of such fretting. "But I told her she need n't worry about that. Her father worked too long for the road for Mr. Darl'n'ton to turn her off for a spell of sickness."

The convalescent shot a warning glance at her mother — which the latter seemed to be entirely prepared for — and hastened to explain, with another flush, —

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"I don't know as I worried about that so much. I guess I'm not very patient. But everything seemed to wear on my nerves so, and I hate to think of my work getting behind, with the reports coming on."

"You get your mind off those reports," said Carol, practically. "You must n't go out before you are well. There is nothing gained by that, you know. A relapse in the case of grip is very bad, they say, and no doubt it's grip you have."

"That's just what I've been tellin' her, Miss Darl'n'ton," broke in the mother again, with an air of triumph. "Go out a week too soon, and then come back for a month. I told her you'd understand that, and would n't expect her back before she was well and strong again. But she would have it —"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the daughter, as if fearful of another indiscretion on the part of her mother. "I keep worrying about my work when I know I ought n't to, but somehow I can't help it."

"I can sympathize with you there," said Carol, dropping her eyes, with a shifting movement, to the bundle of tickets, which Lizzie's mother had been furtively eyeing. "When I'm sick, — which is not very often, I'm thankful to say, — I am doing my work night and day."

"There's been so much grip out this way, this fall," said Lizzie's mother; "and we've had one death," she added, impressively. "Mr. Hatch's little girl. The third death in the family in two years. Maybe you know him. They used to live in town."

Carol shook her head, and said "No," and Lizzie began, as if doubting Miss Darlington's interest in Clifton affairs: "It's very kind of you to call, Miss

Darlington. It's so lonesome out here, shut up in the house, especially in the fall. Everything is so melancholy then, anyway, — to me. There's no company here whatever. I used to think I'd like to be agent here, after father died, but I don't believe I could stand it now — after going to town every day for so long."

"There's worse holes than Clifton, Lizzie," said her mother, reprovingly, — a statement which Carol rather doubted. "Still, I will say," she added, in extenuation of her daughter's remark, "that there's nobody here that we care much to associate with. We don't have much in common with these people, Lizzie working in town, and us both goin' to church there." This last with a touch of pride. "There's few enough here that go to church anywhere, for that matter," she added.

A mild light shone from Carol's eyes which might possibly have become a smile under other circumstances. "I can see how that is," she said. After a momentary pause she added: "Lizzie, I bundled up your tickets before I came out, and brought them along. I thought perhaps, if you could straighten them out with me, the other girls could go on with the work, and the reports would n't be delayed very much, after all. But if you don't feel like it, you must say so."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the girl, with an eager glance toward the bundle. "Leave them here, and I'll fix them up alone. I'd sooner do it than not. It will be a relief to have something to do, and to know that my work is not getting behind. I thought once of writing to you and asking you to do that very thing," she continued, happily, "but I was afraid you would n't like to have the tickets go out of the office."

"So long as you take good care of them, and grab

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them the first thing in case of fire," laughed Carol. "I brought a bottle of red ink along, too, and your red-ink pen. I forgot tabulating blanks, but you can rule up any paper for that. Or I'll send them out in the morning on No. 12. That will be best," she added, definitely, the thought striking her that paper might not be as plentiful in that household as in her own. "In the meantime, you can be sorting the tickets and getting ready."

When the ticket question had been disposed of, and while Carol was waiting a decent length of time before rising, Lizzie's mother asked, —

"Did you meet Mr. Kaltenborn coming out, Miss Darl'n'ton?"

"Mr. who?" asked Carol, though she had heard distinctly.

"Kaltenborn," said Lizzie. "He's our new minister. You know we attend the Methodist Church. He left here just before you came."

"No, I did n't meet him," answered Carol. "Perhaps he took the other road. I came out the hay-meadow road. It's better driving, I think."

"He walked," explained Lizzie, with a laugh, though it was plain that this divulging of their pastor's lowly means of travel humiliated the older woman. "I never saw such a man to walk," Lizzie ran on, perhaps to soothe her mother's pride. "He walks out here in a little over an hour. Sometimes he drives, and sometimes he comes on the train, but in fine weather, he says, he prefers to walk."

"He says it's a relief from studyin' so much," added the mother, sedately.

"He brought me those," said Lizzie, pointing with a

glow of pride and pleasure to a cluster of chrysanthemums in a vase on the table.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Carol. "And how thoughtful," she added, quite sure that the flowers had come from a greenhouse. "And I brought tickets!" she exclaimed, self-accusingly.

"I would n't want him to hear me say it," began Lizzie, "for it was very, very kind in him to bring them, but I believe the tickets will do me more good than the flowers. But I appreciate them just as much," she added, conscientiously.

"Of course you do!" said Carol. "Which you can't say of the tickets. But how do you like Mr. Kaltenborn as a minister?"

"I think he's lovely!" answered the girl, enthusiastically, her earlier timidity all gone. "And I guess most of the other members do. At first, I did n't. He seemed at first to be — well, I don't know — kind of cross, don't you know. Not that, either, but — well, unfeeling and arbitrary. But he's just the opposite. He's as kind and thoughtful as he can be. Of course, there are a few who don't like him," she added, truthfully.

"Some sore-heads," contemptuously interposed her mother, who was also growing bolder.

"Well, some of the older people," qualified Lizzie; "some who wanted Mr. Collins returned. They don't think Mr. Kaltenborn is spiritual enough. They say he preaches too much about this life, and not enough about the life hereafter. He does, for that matter. That is, he says that if people know how to live, they will know how to die. He says 'Thy kingdom come,' in the Lord's prayer, means for us to bring the heavenly

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kingdom to earth, and not to wait till we die to get to it. He is all the time saying that it is not only people's right, but their duty, to be cheerful and happy, and to get the most they can out of life. You know there are some people who think that's pretty near heresy," she added, with a quaint little learned look, while her eyes gleamed at her own daring handling of the subject. "That is, I suppose they really believe that we ought to be happy here, but they don't think it ought to be preached. They think a preacher's business is to talk about the other world. But I don't!" she exclaimed, emphatically. "And most young people don't. He's very popular with the young people."

"Even though he won't let them dance!" smiled Carol.

"Well, the discipline forbids that, you know," said Lizzie, more soberly, and Carol felt that any jests along this line would be out of order. So she added, humorously, —

"I can just fancy Mr. Kaltenborn — I have met him once or twice — at loggerheads with some of those strait-laced old fellows. If it ever comes to a battle, I imagine it will be something royal," she laughed.

"It has once already — in a stewards' meeting!" exclaimed Lizzie, with the exultation of a partisan. "Old Eldridge Betts got up and told Mr. Kaltenborn that he would have to stop ladling out that worldly slush, or he would n't pay another dollar of quarterage."

"Rot, he said, Lizzie," corrected the mother, demurely.

"Well, something like that; and Mr. Kaltenborn got up, pretty red in the face, they say, and told old Eldridge that as long as he was in the pulpit he would ladle out what he saw fit; and that he'd ladle it out free of

charge, if any dissenting members did n't see fit to keep their pledges in the way of quarterage ; and that when the majority of the members of the church got tired of his brand of—I don't know what he called it—he'd step down and out—and not before."

Carol laughed again, with genuine enjoyment ; and after listening to a few more instances of the inharmonies in the Methodist Church, she took her departure.

CHAPTER XVI

A MATTER OF HORSEMANSHIP

WHEN Carol was seated in the buggy again, the "marsh" road — the one Kaltenborn must have taken — stretched straight away before her. The other and better road — the one over which she had come — lay behind. She lifted the lines aimlessly, and the horses, after a moment of sagacious hesitation, went straight ahead down the marsh road. Had they turned around, Carol would have let them go that way, she told herself.

The day was a perfect type of Indian summer — blue atmosphere, warm sunshine, painted foliage. The goldenrod flaunted its plumes along the roadside; the fields had a brown, demure, rested look, as though their work was done, and well done, and they were waiting to be put to sleep under their blankets of snow. Here and there a crow winged its labored flight across a field of corn; the sleeping woods were occasionally wakened by the harsh scream of a jay; a red squirrel scurried across the road; a gopher reared its little body rigidly in the air from the withered grass in a fence-corner, its tiny paws folded humanlike upon its breast, its beautiful eyes glistening with a mixture of audacity and fear.

All this Carol saw, and tried to love — and failed. She recalled with pleasure the days when she used to go nutting, but they seemed a long way back, a part of

the irreclaimable past; and she did not feel as sorry over it as she wished she might. She was quite willing to be a child of the town.

During these meditations Kaltenborn was more or less in her mind, and she half-unconsciously scanned the road ahead for a sight of him. It was fifteen minutes, though, before he came into view. There was no mistaking then that broad back and that stride. As she passed him at almost a walk, she called out, cheerily, —

“Mr. Kaltenborn, I have heard all about your constitutionals. I sha’n’t ask you to ride, because I know you would refuse.”

“But I would n’t!” he called back, instantly; and Carol, with a laugh, pulled the horses to a stand-still. She retained the whip side, and Kaltenborn climbed in on the left.

“Who has been telling you about my constitutionals?” he asked.

“Oh, one of those little birds that are such incorrigible tell-tales,” she answered, gaily. “It also told me of your habit of carrying clusters of chrysanthemums about,” she added, with a side glance.

“Good works cannot be hid,” he commented, with a smile. “You have evidently been out to Mrs. Carson’s too.”

“Yes. Lizzie is one of my clerks, you know.”

“One of your most loyal ones, too,” he returned. “I should be almost afraid to have any one entertain of me the opinion she has of you.”

“I suppose I must n’t ask what it is,” she returned, lightly, but her face flushed deeply with pleasure.

“I don’t know that I should tell you, if you did.”

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"Why should you be afraid—if you won't tell me her opinion?"

"I should be afraid of doing something to destroy her faith," he replied.

The flush still lingered on Carol's cheek, and her lashes drooped. "I am afraid her faith is not founded on a rock," she said.

"I think she has reasons for it," said Kaltenborn, confidently. "She admires your cleverness. She thinks you have a wonderful head to be able to do a man's work; and your sitting in directors' meetings, and making reports and suggestions, excites little less than awe in her. I was going to say I wished you could have heard her describe one particular directors' meeting, when you had her there for some purpose or other—to help you find the different documents quickly, I believe."

"I remember," said Carol. "We were organizing the statistical department."

"That was it. But I'm afraid that, if you had heard her, it would have been too much of a strain on your modesty." He paused, and Carol smiled a little. "But, after all," he continued more gravely, "do you know what makes her admire you most—what makes her *love* you? It is because she has never heard you say a cross word to a clerk."

"I never have," said Carol, simply. "I have never had occasion to say one to her. She's a very faithful and a very efficient worker."

"I'm glad you called on her," pursued Kaltenborn, after a moment. "Your call will do her more good than ten from somebody else. She was worrying a little over her work, too, and I think possibly about her position. I understand she has been sick a good deal."

"She has," answered Carol, "but she need n't worry about her position. She's another Johnnie Burbanks, in one respect," she smiled. "Her father was agent at Clifton from the time the road was built until his death."

"I wanted to tell her about Johnnie Burbanks," he interpolated. "A little of the inside history, you know."

Carol looked down under the horses' swiftly moving feet at the white road sweeping under them in dizzy, wavering lines. There was some inside history in that case which she was glad Kaltenborn did not know.

"I have one little confession to make to you, Mr. Kaltenborn," she spoke up, with a queer smile. "My visit to-day was not wholly disinterested. In fact, it was wholly interested. I went out there to get Lizzie's work straightened out, and took her a bundle of tickets and blanks. So you see," she concluded, archly, "that your commending remarks about my calling were coals of fire on my head."

Kaltenborn glanced at the shapely head upon which he had unconsciously been heaping hot embers, and smiled faintly. "You would n't have gone except for the work?" he asked.

"I had not gone," she answered, evasively.

"Did you ever go to see her before when she was sick — without tickets?"

"Just once."

"You talked to her this time — asked about her improvement — wished her well — told her not to worry about her work?"

"Oh, yes. I am not entirely hardened."

"You saw that it pleased her and did her good?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"And it gave you a sense of pleasure?"

"Yes."

"And you are glad now that you went?"

"Oh, yes," she still assented, now smiling broadly.

"So glad that you may be tempted to renew the pleasure some time, either by going there or to some other sick-room?"

"I don't know, Mr. Kaltenborn," she answered, frankly. "I'm ashamed to confess it, but I don't like to visit the sick. The stuffy rooms, and the smell of medicine, and the muffled door-bells, and the tip-toeing about and whispering simply take the gimp out of me. It gives me the horrors. Of course, Lizzie is not that sick. And I don't mean my friends. It's different with them, and of course I do visit them. I can talk to them. But to go and visit people that I don't know, and don't have anything in common with, and ask them how they are, and offer consolation" — she flashed him a glance — "I simply can't do it. I feel like a hypocrite, and I imagine all the time that they are resenting it. I don't suppose they are, though I know I should; but it simply is n't in me to palaver over people in that way," she concluded, earnestly.

"I don't know that I would have you palaver, exactly," answered Kaltenborn.

Carol burst into a quick laugh. "I did n't mean palaver either — that's one of papa's words," she explained, with a slight blush. "But I mean to — well, I don't know; papa would say 'slosh around,' and that really about expresses it." She laughed again, a little disconcertedly, and looked at Kaltenborn appealingly.

"You don't even have to 'slosh around,'" said Kaltenborn, laughing quietly. "When you go into the humblest sick-room, I would not have you lay aside one

got or tittle of anything that your advantages have given you. Carry your ideals in with you — just as you do to your friends. Never fear but you will be understood, and will confer a benefit."

"I don't know," answered Carol, doubtfully. "Don't you think one is likely to be thought priggish?"

"Not once in a hundred times," he replied, decidedly.

"Well, you ought to know," she returned, but still unconvinced, as he could see. "Do you know, I'm a little afraid of real poor people."

"I perceive that," he answered, dryly.

They were approaching a threshing-machine at work in a barnyard close to the road, and Nip and Tuck began to quiver. Carol tightened her lines, and took out the whip. As they came abreast the noisy machine the horses lunged violently to one side, and broke into a run. Bracing herself against the iron foot-rest, Carol directed the powerful animals as best she could, without wasting too much strength in trying to check them prematurely. At the same time she worked upon them with her voice.

Her face was lively with a daring pleasure rather than fear. The road at this point and for some distance beyond was bordered with a level, grassy stretch, and along this the horses plunged for several rods. Then Carol got them back into the road again, where she kept them without great difficulty. But her efforts to stop them were unavailing. Her strength, multiplied many times though it was by bit and rein, was but a puny force with which to oppose the broad-haunched, great-muscled, and now thoroughly frightened animals in front of her. Still she persisted courageously, with set lips, in sawing their mouths

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Kaltenborn sat perfectly still, with one arm over the back of the seat, in the position he had occupied when the horses took alarm. He had either perfect confidence in Carol's horsemanship or a knowledge of her sensitiveness on that subject and a willingness to humor it at the risk of broken bones. Even when Carol's bosom began to heave from her violent exertions, he made no motion to help her. Once he drew his hat a little tighter on his head, for their speed was creating a stiff breeze.

"My arms are getting very tired!" she gasped at last.

Kaltenborn, with an inscrutable expression, instantly reached for the lines, grasping them well in front of her hands. As his powerful figure stiffened, the horses' necks doubled, and their speed instantly slackened, with a shock. But careful not to put too much strain on the harness, he let them run a little longer, until their fright gave way to the intolerable pain in their mouths from the drawn bits, and they came down to a quivering, nervous prancing. Kaltenborn held the lines a little longer, that Carol's arms might have a further rest. He could see that she was still much more chagrined than frightened.

"That's the first time they ever got the best of me," she said, with a laugh which failed to conceal her pique. "I suppose if I had been alone, I *could* have stopped them, as a matter of necessity. But I cried for quarter, and I'll admit it. Yet I have driven horses all my life, and I never saw one yet that I was afraid of. I'm the only one in the family who cares to drive these, and both Bert and papa are pretty good horsemen. I used to drive a span of broncos when I was seventeen — and you know what broncos are. Yet I never had an acci-

dent, nor, before, anything as nearly approaching one as this to-day." She bit her lip a little to hide its trembling — to Kaltenborn's amazement.

"The most important lesson a horseman learns is that any horse can run away with any driver, if he makes up his mind to do it," he returned, soothingly.

"I know that," she said, humbly. "But they did n't run with you."

"Others have," he replied, "and possibly I'm a little stronger than you," he added, smiling.

"You know that handling horses is not a matter of strength," she said, reproachfully.

"Sometimes it is. It was at the stage when I took hold."

"I should never have let them reach that stage," she returned, ruefully. "You have driven before."

"Yes."

"Do you keep a horse now?"

"No."

"I should think you would be lost without one," she exclaimed, glad to get off the subject of runaways. "I believe I should miss our horses more than anything else we have, even the piano."

"I miss mine," he said, and there was a note of regret in his voice which arrested her attention. But he carried the theme no further, and began to talk about something else than horses.

When he got down in front of Mrs. Hicks's, Carol said, with some embarrassment, "Please don't say anything about this — the runaway. If mamma found it out, she would never be easy again with me out behind Nip and Tuck. And — I don't want anybody else to know it. I'm ashamed of it!"

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"My lips are sealed," Kaltenborn answered, with a comprehensive smile.

"There's one thing I should like to know," she began, hesitatingly, and paused in slight confusion. "Why did you make me ask for help, Mr. Kaltenborn?"

Again that inscrutable expression came over his face, and it made her uncomfortable. "Because I was n't sure until then that you needed help."

"Was that the only reason?" she asked, doubtfully.

"What other reason could there be?" he asked, evasively.

"Well," she observed, humbly, "if you had taken the lines unbidden, it would n't have been quite so humiliating to me. I should n't have had to confess my helplessness."

"Confession is said to be good for the soul," he returned, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I was quite sure that you thought so," she answered, quickly, as she lifted the lines. "Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVII

PRO'S AND CON'S

At the dinner-table Ruth asked, "Who was that man you had out riding, Carol?" Her intonation turned all eyes on Carol.

"That was a German nobleman," answered Carol, coolly. "Didn't he look like one?"

"I never saw a German nobleman," answered Ruth, shortly. "Who was he?"

"A German nobleman, I tell you, a baron, or something of the kind," answered Carol, provokingly. Possibly she was also trying to cover the least embarrassment.

Ruth tossed her head. "I thought he was some kind of a foreign specimen," she said, sarcastically, "and I judged from his complexion that he hailed from a land where there is no public sentiment against beer." Kaltenborn was certainly ruddy, but Ruth was just as certainly drawing on her imagination now.

"Ruth," interposed Mrs. Darlington, "your language at times is a little pronounced for a young girl. Tell her who you were with, Carol."

"A German nobleman who is at present studying American customs incognito, under the alias of Stephen Kaltenborn. He has even gone so far as to palm himself off on the Methodist Church here as a minister of the gospel."

Ruth, still unconciliated, asked scathingly, "Did he talk religion to you?"

"To hear you talk, Babe, one would think I was a pagan, instead of a member in good standing of the Episcopal Church," said Carol, sweetly.

Mr. Darlington glanced up with his humorous twinkle. "Helping him with his pastoral calls?" he asked.

"She was probably giving him a few pointers on dancing and card-playing," suggested Bert. "We may look for a fulmination against these vices next Sunday night, *à la* Collins."

Carol waited until their witticisms were spent, and then explained how Kaltenborn happened to be riding with her.

"I hear he's a very different man from Mr. Collins," said Mrs. Darlington. "He addressed the Ladies' Aid Society last week, and gave a very sensible talk. He has evidently given systematic charities a good deal of thought."

"Mamma will be having him around to dinner next," suggested Ruth, saucily. "If that little Jap were only here now, and those two Chaldeans that worked mamma for ten dollars, we could have a lively little dinner-party, with Mr. Kaltenborn as guest of honor." Her roguish face at the moment was the picture of her father's, softened by youth and sex, for she was also dark. A general laugh followed this shot at Mrs. Darlington's recognized weakness for any charlatan approaching her in the name of religion. Bert, however, gave her a sympathetic smile, in addition.

"I think it would be perfectly proper to have him here for dinner some day," she said, defensively. "He's a stranger here, comparatively, and I think it would be

a nice thing to let him know that he has the sympathy and good wishes of some people outside his own church."

"Have him around, then," said Darlington. "If I'm any judge of human nature, he'd enjoy a quiet little smoke out of sight of his parishioners."

"I suspect you are no judge, then, Charles," returned Mrs. Darlington, quietly.

"I don't doubt he has smoked," remarked Bert. "Where do you imagine he was educated?" he asked, knowingly.

"Where?" asked Carol, curiously.

"Heidelberg," said Bert.

"What Heidelberg?" demanded Carol, sceptically.

"Heidelberg, Germany."

"Who told you?" she asked, still incredulous.

"The gentleman himself."

"Then he was probably born in Germany," said Carol, thinking of Rose Blumenthal's German baron.

"No, in this country," answered her brother.

"Where do you suppose he got the money?" she asked, having in mind also what Kaltenborn had said about once owning horses.

"I did n't ask him," Bert returned, facetiously.

✓ "Probably by fighting grasping corporations," suggested Mr. Darlington, at which Carol flushed slightly.

"His church may possibly have sent him," said Mrs. Darlington. "I know they help to educate their poor young men."

"I guess they don't send many of them to Europe," observed Darlington.

When Carol went to her room to write some letters, later in the evening, Bert followed her. The bond be-

tween these two was strong. Bert was as different from his father as one of the same blood could well be. He utterly lacked his father's shrewdness and many other of those business qualities which appealed so vividly to Carol's imagination. Yet she never regarded Bert's capacity lightly. His popularity, in the first place, impressed her; his dignity was superior to his father's, more substantial and genuine; and he was possessed of a conscientiousness in even the most trivial matters that sometimes made his elder sister blush for herself.

Bert, in return, held his sister's intellect in unbounded admiration. Her very subserviency to the expedient — perhaps the weakest point about her, and utterly opposed to Bert's simple nature — was regarded by him as an unmistakable mark of her superiority. He worshipped it as tact, and something hopelessly out of his reach.

Carol wrote, and Bert smoked and read, neither speaking for some moments. Finally Carol paused, and drumming on her teeth with her penholder, asked, casually, "Is that true about Mr. Kaltenborn going to Heidelberg?"

Bert nodded yes.

"Then he must have had money once," she returned, conclusively.

"Not necessarily. He may have worked and saved enough money to go to Germany. He's been preaching only a short time, and he must be thirty-five or forty."

"He is n't forty," she observed. "I wonder who or what his family is."

"I don't know," answered Bert, without much interest, and without lifting his eyes from his book.

Carol wrote on for another minute. "Where did you meet him?" she asked.

"I don't know — Fillingham's drug-store."

"When?"

"Two or three weeks ago."

"You never said anything about it."

"Was it so important?" he asked, smiling.

Carol turned to her writing again, after this warning, but Bert went on of his own accord. "There was a crowd of us in the back part of the store when Kaltenborn came in, and Bert Benson introduced him around, with a kind of a smirk on his face as though it were a joke."

"I'm not surprised," said Carol, contemptuously. "Nothing that young gentleman does surprises me any more."

"When the crowd started, a minute later, to go up to the club to play pool, Benson asked Kaltenborn if he wouldn't go too."

Carol turned in her chair, and looked at her brother sharply. There was no doubt of his earnestness. "What did he say?" she asked, indignantly.

"He refused, of course, — very graciously, though, and we walked up home together."

For a moment Carol's eyes gleamed hotly, but shortly grew softer. "What do the boys think of him?" she asked.

"I haven't heard them say. They probably don't see much of him."

"Did he tell you then about going to Heidelberg?" she asked.

"Yes. He mentioned a duel he fought there." Bert looked up with a grin as he said it.

"A duel!" exclaimed Carol, again swinging in her chair. "You are yarning, Bert!"

"Honor bright. The next time you see him close, you look for a little scar on his right temple. He came within an ace, he said, of losing his eye."

"How in the world did he ever happen to do such a thing as fight a duel — a minister of the gospel?" she asked, with a little shudder at Bert's reference to the eye.

"I don't know that he was a minister then, or even thought of being one. In fact, come to think, I know he was n't, for he was only twenty-two then."

Carol nibbled the end of the penholder a minute, thoughtfully. "How did he happen to tell you about it?"

"I don't know. The fellows had been talking about French duels before we left the drug-store. Cash said something about seeing one when he was in Paris, and Kaltenborn and I continued the talk."

Carol turned back to the table, and wrote on for a few minutes, with a clear, liquid light in her eyes, which seemed to indicate that she was carrying on two mental processes at the same time, — one for herself, the other for her correspondent.

"Did he tell it as though, — in a boastful way, — as though he wanted you to know that, while he was a preacher, he was no tenderfoot?" she asked, finally.

"It did n't strike me so," Bert answered, and with that the subject was dropped. After a little Bert rose and stretched himself. He was not much of a reader, nor were any of the Darlingtons, for that matter, except possibly Ruth. "I think I'll go up and see Elsie a minute," he yawned.

Carol gave a short, taunting laugh. "A minute! Why don't you say you are going to spend the evening? Elsie

would be delighted to see you apologizing here with your minutes and your yawns."

"I am not going to spend the evening," answered Bert, briefly. "I am going to lodge about nine."

"What on earth do you people find to talk about?" asked Carol, half in earnest.

"We generally speculate on what you and Cash Winter talk about," answered Bert, dryly.

"You are improving, brother," said Carol, acknowledging the point of his wit with a smile. She added, with a touch of seriousness, though, "Cash was here last a week ago last Wednesday night. He may be here again this week, and he may not."

Bert was standing behind her. Dropping the remains of his cigarette into a bronze ash-tray, which, by reason of Bert's social habits, was a necessary adjunct to Carol's furniture, he laid his hands upon her shoulders, and said, knowingly, "You won't break your heart if he is n't."

"No-o," she admitted, slowly, doubtful about encouraging this form of brotherly guardianship.

After a moment he murmured, "I nearly broke *her* heart, sis, the last time." It was the first allusion between them to his recent fall.

"Such things do break hearts sometimes," she answered, gently but firmly. "Remember that!"

Mrs. Darlington was not a woman of much originality, but when she did conceive a project she was slow to relinquish it. Consequently Kaltenborn received, not many days later, an invitation to dine at the Darlington's. Carol fancied that he might not accept it. He was sensitive, for one thing, she had discovered, and he might regard the invitation as a form of patronage. Moreover,

she was doubtful of the impression her father had left upon Kaltenborn in the interview about the pension. Above all, if Kaltenborn was at all familiar with the history of his predecessors in the Ashboro pastorate, and had any idea of following their precedents, he would certainly avoid any social connection with the Darlington's ; for it was undeniable that the Methodist preachers of Ashboro and the railroad, — that is to say, the Darlington's, — had never yet succeeded in maintaining perfect amity between themselves for any length of time. Whatever the causes of this hostility, — the occasional conflicts between employer and employed, the natural friction between aristocracy and democracy, or a worldliness on the part of the Darlington's and an over-zealousness on the part of the Methodists, — President Darlington had come to look with suspicion upon every Methodist preacher sent to Ashboro, and every Methodist preacher sent to Ashboro had come, after very little leaning on the pillars of his church, to look with suspicion upon President Darlington.

Carol was therefore particularly pleased when Kaltenborn's note of acceptance arrived ; and when he himself arrived, dressed in his inevitable Prince Albert, she received him with perhaps more warmth than the length of their acquaintance or the occasion made necessary. Kaltenborn was not the man, though, to take advantage of any such fortuitous circumstance, and he returned Carol's greeting with a dignified graciousness not differing radically from his manner on that day when Carol had tried to freeze him in Mrs. Hicks's parlor.

At the table he was much the same, Carol noted with a little amused admiration. He talked seriously, he accepted or refused dishes seriously, he ate seriously.

Yet there was no suggestion of gloom or asceticism in his seriousness. He expressed himself with a precision and conscientiousness that were refreshing. If he agreed with any one, that one was very sure he meant it, for he disagreed with unconventional freedom and frankness. If a subject was too light to interest him, he kept still. This peculiarity, which might of itself have proved tedious at a dinner, was fully offset by the genuineness of his sympathy in all matters not trifling. With it all, he was not devoid of humor of a quiet, subtle kind. He seldom laughed, and even his smiles were not broad; but they lit his face with a radiance that attested their sincerity.

Carol had feared that he might prove a "crank." But he did not. Not once did he fall into any intemperance of thought or speech. Nor did he press his opinions. If he disagreed, he put himself upon record, and that was all. The conversation, at the table and afterward, covered a wide range of topics. Mr. Darlington talked "shop" with his usual freedom and vivacity, but Kaltenborn did not introduce religion.

After dinner, Mr. Darlington got out his customary cigar. Ruth gave Carol a significant glance, and Carol passed it on to her father, which, according to the family code, might be interpreted that he should at least excuse himself, and possibly retire to the study. Mr. Darlington balanced his cigar between his fingers a moment before lighting it, in fine defiance of all this prudery.

"I don't suppose you smoke, Mr. Kaltenborn," he began, breezily, — with an extra touch, in fact, for his daughters' benefit. "I suppose you know that I do, and if it's not offensive to you, I'll light up."

"It won't bother me in the least," said Kaltenborn.

"On the contrary, I enjoy the smell of a cigar. There's a healthy, antiseptic suggestion about it."

"It has always seemed to me," returned Mr. Darlington, swellingly, as he settled comfortably into his chair, and sent a cloud of smoke ceilingward, "that preachers deprive themselves of a great deal of innocent pleasure by abstaining from the use of tobacco. Why do they do it? Of course, I know why some of them do it. Some of them rank tobacco along with whiskey and opium — and dynamite. But why do the intelligent, liberal-minded ones usually refrain from using it? Why do you yourself?"

Kaltenborn smiled in acknowledgment of his host's complimentary innuendo. "I suppose because they believe that one man's meat is another man's poison. I used to smoke, and did until I entered the ministry. I don't think it ever hurt me any, broadly speaking. Yet I think there were days when I smoked too much, and felt a little sluggish from it or nervous. But I believe there are some people that tobacco, in the smallest quantity, hurts. And if a preacher smokes publicly, such people may be encouraged in the practice, especially if they are young."

"Why not smoke privately, then?" asked Darlington, with another complacent exhalation.

"Well, the Methodist Church practically forbids smoking by its ministers, for one thing. A young man who smokes cannot be admitted to the ministry now. Aside from that, I don't believe a man can smoke in private without being detected sooner or later; and if he could, I don't believe he could do it without a loss of self-respect."

"Even though he sees no harm in it, and only does it

privately on account of a lot of narrow-minded cranks?" asked Darlington, incredulously.

"Yes, even though he believes all that. There is something hurtful in a clandestine act, whatever the motive. And it's a question with me whether any clandestine act is justifiable from the highest moral point of view. Moreover, smoking, I think, is a useless and an expensive habit."

"How about coffee-drinking?" said Mr. Darlington, with the quiet air of a man propounding a poser.

"Undoubtedly a great many people would be better off without coffee," answered Kaltenborn, laughing.

"But you drink it?"

"Yes, I do. But you will admit yourself that there is a difference between coffee and tobacco."

"Can't see it — from our point of argument," said Darlington, obstinately.

"There is a difference, nevertheless," pursued Kaltenborn. "It is not as expensive a habit, to begin with, — a thing to be considered by most people; and while we hear of a 'coffee drunkard' now and then, I don't think coffee is likely to get the hold on one that tobacco gets. And it is used by both sexes, and is not so generally condemned."

"I can't see a bit more sense in your being required to give up tobacco than coffee," insisted Darlington.

"He does, but he won't admit it, Mr. Kaltenborn," interposed Ruth, with a venturesome laugh.

"No, I don't," said her father, positively. "When you get right down to it, in the light of reason, every objection that applies to smoking applies to drinking coffee."

"How about mince-pies, Mr. Kaltenborn?" asked Carol, to divert the gentlemen from their argument.

"I plead guilty again," he answered.

"Knowing that they are proverbially indigestible!" she exclaimed, jocosely.

"Knowing that they are proverbially good," he answered. Then assuming a more serious expression, and turning to Mr. Darlington again, he continued: "This matter of smoking or not smoking is to be settled by every man individually. If he sees no harm in smoking, moral or physical, to himself, or to any one else by force of example, let him go ahead and smoke. If it's a question with him, I should advise him, in order to be on the safe side, to refrain. There comes a time in the lives of most of us when we view our actions in their relation to others as well as to ourselves. If you see a young lad slowly paralyzing his energies with tobacco, planting seeds of misery for himself and for his children and his children's children, you can't walk up to him with a rich Havana in your mouth, and make him believe that smoking is wrong. You may be consistent; it may be that you did n't smoke until you were mature, and that you don't smoke to excess, and that smoking in moderation does n't hurt you. But that boy will never make those distinctions."

Darlington rolled his cigar comfortably between his teeth to offset this uncomfortable doctrine. "There are some people, Mr. Kaltenborn," he answered, "who are weak, inherently weak, and are bound to go to the dogs in any case, no matter how closely they are guarded. I believe that these temptations have a purpose. They're a test; it's a kind of weeding out of the garden of humanity — a survival of the fittest. The

people that survive these temptations have proved their worthiness."

The first example that came to Kaltenborn's mind was Darlington's own son. He knew well enough that Darlington did not put his theory into practice by setting a decanter of whiskey on his sideboard. He knew, on the contrary, that such a thing had sat there until Bert developed his weakness, and not a day after that. But of course he could say none of this, and no one else seemed to be thinking of it except possibly Mrs. Darlington. She was looking at Kaltenborn with earnest, thoughtful eyes, and he felt instinctively that what he had said had met with her approval.

Carol accompanied Kaltenborn to the door when he left. When they were alone, she said, laughing, but half in earnest, "I suppose I have not reached the proper stage yet, but I don't know that I have ever given up anything simply for the sake of others — anything special."

"Did n't you give up a little false pride once for Mrs. Burbanks's sake?" he asked, looking her squarely in the eye. She flushed; and without giving her time to answer, he extended his hand and said good-night.

As Carol undressed she wondered casually what Kaltenborn thought of her and her family. She was very proud of her family; proud of its social position, its intelligence, even its wealth, because that represented industry and brains. She was very proud of herself for much the same reasons. She knew, without offensive vanity, that she was shrewder than most women; she knew that she satisfactorily filled a responsible position. But she doubted seriously that Kaltenborn understood and appreciated all these facts. They cer-

tainly had failed to impress him much, and she was disposed to feel a little piqued at his independence, for it was manifestly not assumed. But, after all, this pique was very foolish, she told herself. Kaltenborn was only an eccentric preacher, with but half an eye, probably, for anything outside the church. He could not be a very fine preacher, either, for the Ashboro Methodist Church was certainly not a choice appointment. Doubtless the salary was very small, too.

CHAPTER XVIII

KALTENBORN'S FLOCK

A FEW days after Kaltenborn dined at the Darlings', a young woman presented herself at Carol's desk bearing a note from him. It read: "This young woman is soliciting money to transport three orphan children to relatives on the Pacific Coast. If you will give her a dollar or two, you will be lending a helping hand to the helpless."

Smiling at this characteristic note, Carol took her purse from a drawer, and gave the young woman two dollars. "May I ask how much Mr. Kaltenborn gave?" she asked, the question being suggested by the young woman's writing down Carol's name on a list, with the amount of her contribution opposite.

"Five dollars," answered the young woman, with a peculiar smile. It seemed to Carol that there was something unfavorable to her in that smile, and she traced it to the difference between her contribution and Kaltenborn's — a difference magnified several times by the difference in their material prosperity. Hiding her feelings, though, she immediately made her contribution ten dollars, saying lightly, "If he gave five, I think I can give ten."

At the same time she felt vexed at Kaltenborn for asking her for only a dollar or two when he himself had

given five. It looked a little affected, though it was not supposable that he had intended she should know what he had given. The next time she met him she jestingly accused him of having small faith in her charity.

"I knew you would give whatever sum I named," Kaltenborn explained. "Hence I did n't feel at liberty to name a very large sum. It would have smacked of extortion." He smiled.

"Why name any sum?" she asked.

"That would have been extortion too," he answered. "You would have immediately assumed that I had sent that young woman to you with a hint that you were a gold mine, and you would have lived up to that assumption, whether you wanted to or not, — being a young woman of considerable pride, — and would probably have given her a ten-dollar note."

"That's just what I did give her," she answered, triumphantly.

"I'm sorry," said he, briefly.

She looked at him with surprise tinged with vexation. "Why should you be?" she asked. "You are not treating me fairly," she complained, forcing a playfulness. "If you had had faith in me and my charity, you would have known that I should be as glad to give as you were."

"I believe you would lend your pocketbook to a case of suffering as quickly as any one I know of. But people's ideas of what constitutes a case of suffering differ."

"In other words, I am too case-hardened to see anything pathetic in three little children left orphans, twenty-five hundred miles from their nearest relative," she said, sarcastically. "Really, Mr. Kaltenborn!"

"Is n't that a little strong?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Is n't it true?" she retorted.

"One might see a great deal of pathos in such a case, and yet not feel called upon to give very liberally. You might have regarded it as a case for some of the organized charities to which you doubtless subscribe, or for the county. But what's the use of arguing, when I am prepared to put your charity to a test, right now!" He smiled significantly.

"Go ahead!" she said, defiantly. "I'm worked up now to where I'd give away the half of my kingdom."

"There is to be an entertainment at our church a week from to-night, for the benefit of superannuated preachers. They constitute our Grand Army, you know, — the boys who went to the front in pioneer days, — and we've got to take care of them now. There will be singing and speaking and instrumental music, all by members of our church or Sunday-school. I feel that if I could get an outsider to take part, it would materially increase the receipts, — especially such an outsider as you, if you will allow me to say it. I understand that you have quite a reputation as an elocutionist. Will you help us out?"

Carol dropped her eyes, and described the segment of a circle with her toe. They were standing upon the steps of the railroad building.

"That *is* a test, Mr. Kaltenborn," she answered, frankly, lifting her head and photographing him with her full blue eye. "I used to read a good deal, it's true, but for a year I have refused every request. It got to be too much of a draft upon my time. There was nothing in the way of entertainments, especially by the churches, that I was not asked to take part in. You

have no idea how conscienceless people are about those things." He said nothing as she paused, and she continued: "I don't know what to say. I wish you had asked anything else. I would sooner give you in cash ten times the amount my presence will add to your receipts." She looked at him suggestively.

"I can't take it," he said, shortly.

"Why not, if I prefer to give it?"

"If the work is as repugnant to you as that, I don't want you to do it, or do anything in lieu of it."

"It's just that repugnant," said Carol, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Then you don't want to do it?"

"I certainly don't *want* to," she returned, with a puzzled laugh.

"Then you won't?"

"No, I will," she answered emphatically. "Principally for the reason that I don't want to, I suppose," she added, to cut off any compliments. "Have you any choice in the way of a selection?" she asked, almost brusquely.

"None," he answered. "Anything suitable for a mixed audience of a religious character," he added, but whether as an explanation or a fling at her brusqueness she was not sure.

Carol wanted very much to say something rude, especially if it could be also something witty; but she curbed her lawless spirit, and bade him good-afternoon in a very civil tone. What Kaltenborn thought of the affair was not apparent; but as she walked away, with possibly an augmented dignity, a smile so shrewd and knowing came over his face that one would never have charged him with blundering.

Kaltenborn met Miss Darlington at the horse-block in front of the church on the night of the entertainment, and helped her down from the landau, which had been driven over by Tom, the hostler. She wore a long riding-coat which fell to her heels and hid the white gown beneath, except in front, where the coat flared open. The garment, with its great pearl buttons — larger than doll-saucers — undoubtedly set Carol's tall figure off to advantage. Kaltenborn was not insensible to this ; but if he had been, the eyes of the bystanders, as he led Miss Darlington in, would have apprised him of it. The women especially stared at her.

When Carol emerged from the improvised dressing-room downstairs, Kaltenborn was again within hailing distance. Her cheeks were a delicious, soft, downy red — from the ride, Kaltenborn supposed ; her eyes were crystalline with high spirits and amiability, and she gave Kaltenborn her hand with an unmistakable manifestation of good-will and fellow-feeling.

Kaltenborn led her upstairs to a seat in one of the "amen" corners, which had been set aside for the performers. From here she had a good view of the audience. About a third, or more, she fancied, were children. The adults were for the most part plain working-people, some of whom she recognized as employes of the road. They had a freshly washed and brushed and dressed appearance, and sat primly upright in their seats, and whispered little, as though at a devotional service. The men were a serious, manly looking lot ; the women generally looked thin and nervous and sallow and overworked, and there were not many pretty faces among even the younger ones. Among them sat Lizzie Carson and her mother.

In the centre of the room she saw, somewhat to her surprise, a bevy of her girl friends. Their presence vaguely displeased her. Decorous as they were, they were plainly out for a lark ; they expected to be amused, and were on the lookout for novelties. They scrutinized every new-comer, not boldly or impolitely, but with a zest that was unmistakable. As a result the group was somewhat conspicuous for its whispering and craning of necks ; and the people in front of them and on either side looked self-conscious and uncomfortable, and a little hostile. Carol saw some of the girls trying to catch her eye. She refused to see them, but she felt that she was being identified with them by more than one. She probably was.

The programme, up to Carol's number—she was reserved, it seemed, as a *tour de force*—was worse than mediocre. The numbers were announced, in the absence of a printed programme, by a young woman in spectacles, who seemed to have considerable difficulty in seeing even with this artificial aid ; for she stumbled over the names of those taking part, and most wofully mangled with her tongue the foreign composers and the titles of their compositions.

There were not many of the latter, however. Most of the music was democratically American, and was applauded with democratic indiscriminate. One song, of eight or nine eight-line stanzas, which, as music, was beneath contempt, and which set forth a most harrowing tale of broken faith, was received with vociferous manifestations of pleasure ; and the young miss who sang it walked demurely back to the platform again, and sang the whole lugubrious epic through once more, to the whining accompaniment of a cabinet-organ.

A little bullet-headed boy, who came up, bobbed his head, galloped through a comic quatrain, bobbed his head again, and disappeared, also elicited a roar of applause. He was funny, though, and Carol herself laughed. A chorus of Sunday-school tots, with their dolls in their arms, were also pleasing. Their crimped and ribboned hair, their spick-and-span white dresses, with their ruffles and frills and embroideries, their new creaking shoes, all hinted of parental pride and prosperity.

But, for the most part, the programme was dreary enough to Carol. Embarrassed, awkward girls, too old to be innocent, too young to be artful, ground their way through prosy lengths of verse. Other young girls played simple compositions on the organ, or sang stirring ballads in a most unstimulating manner. A few half-grown boys, some looking sheepish, others impish, lent their assistance. Some of these went through their "pieces" without a break; some had to be prompted. Others, who forgot and had no prompters, floundered around a while, and either went back a few lines and thus gained enough momentum to carry them over the rough spot, or collapsed entirely.

If Carol had had any doubts about being reserved as a *tour de force*, they were certainly expelled when she mounted the platform. An expectant rustle passed over the crowded house; and the hush which followed as she held her tall, commanding figure in poise for a moment before beginning, was more flattering than the loudest applause.

She had intended to read a selection from "Evangeline;" but after looking over her audience, and listening to the other recitations, and noting the applause

they elicited, she had changed her mind and substituted "A New Lochinvar." Just before she opened her lips to begin, however, she caught sight of Kaltenborn. He was leaning easily back, with his arm over the seat, his steady gray-blue eyes fixed upon her with intelligent expectation. He looked less austere than usual, in the church though he was, — more like a man who had tasted and enjoyed the good things of the world. And Carol fancied, in the second allowed her for fancy, that perhaps her compliance in reading for him had something to do with that softened expression.

In that same second her substitution of Carleton's jingling lines for "Evangeline" seemed like an unworthy, almost cowardly, pandering to popularity, and like treachery to herself, her art, and — Kaltenborn. Therefore she began abruptly the story of the Acadian maid, and told it with a grace, fervor, and power that perhaps she had never commanded before.

She did not care much for the burst of applause which followed, and which continued until she had responded with a short encore, though it seemed to justify a remark Kaltenborn had once made to her, — that no matter how common a man is, he enjoys something uncommon. But she would have given a good deal to know if Kaltenborn himself appreciated the art in her work, or had an adequate conception of the weary days and weeks she had spent in acquiring that art. He came up after the entertainment, and gave her his hand in congratulation, and said, with sincere pleasure in his voice, "It came up to my expectations ; and I expected much."

"I don't know why you should, though," she returned, archly evading his compliment, but at the same time compensating him with that confiding glance which

women bestow only upon those men whom they have learned to trust.

"Because I have learned that whatever you do, you do well," he answered. She allowed her pleasure to shine softly from her eyes.

A luncheon, with coffee, was to be served in the church parlors in the basement below, by one of the Sunday-school classes, in honor of the performers and their friends and families. Kaltenborn insisted on Carol's remaining. He seemed to have so set his heart on it that she consented, reluctantly, and went downstairs with a good deal of curiosity and not a little perturbation. She had not forgotten her excoriation by a former pastor of these same people for carrying a party of young people to the opera at High Point.

She fancied, after she got downstairs, that the people had not forgotten it either. They seemed to treat her stiffly; they talked little, and she found herself compelled to take the initiative every time. As Kaltenborn introduced them to her, they shook hands, or bowed, and then fell back, sometimes after exchanging a few words, sometimes without. Some of them Carol already knew; some of them she felt almost as though she knew — she had seen them so often, in the street and elsewhere, or had heard their names mentioned so often. There were two young women, also, whom she had met once at some gathering. But there was not one there whom she was in the habit of meeting socially, and the great majority were strangers, though their faces and names were more or less familiar. Hence Carol felt out of place. She felt as though she was being stared at and privately discussed. She caught more than one eye fixed on her gown — which

was cut low in the neck — and a great many persons seemed to be interested in the dressing of her hair. The children stared at her openly and shamelessly.

As she sat at table next to Kaltenborn, she tried to appear oblivious of all this attention and to keep up a connected conversation. But the attempt was a flat failure. The inhospitable air chilled her, and before the luncheon was over she had grown silent and self-conscious.

The truth is, Carol Darlington, with all her force of character and all her independence among her associates and all her impatience of convention, was exquisitely sensitive to the opinion of the "other half." To use her own words, she was "afraid of the poor." She was afraid of being thought priggish, afraid that they resented her superior birth and social position, and yet afraid that they would resent any attempt to conceal such superiority. As a matter of fact, most of what she thought stiffness in Kaltenborn's parishioners was merely deference, awkwardly paid. Or, at the worst, it was thought only to be fine manners. Their very silence was a tribute to her superiority; and their coming up, shaking hands, and falling back, in a perfectly cold-blooded way, was exactly the treatment they would have given a queen.

Kaltenborn talked serenely on, apparently not noticing her distractness, and eating quite heartily, Carol noticed. When the people began to go, he walked to the door with Carol. For some reason the landau had failed to return. Kaltenborn offered to send for it, or to get her another conveyance; but she said that she would just as soon walk, if he would be good enough to go with her.

As soon as they were alone, Kaltenborn's conversational mood seemed to desert him; and Carol could not, for the life of her, think of anything to say that would not sound forced. They therefore walked along in silence. At her door he shook hands with her, and thanked her for her assistance. Still he lingered before saying good-night; and when the fact of lingering could no longer be concealed, he said, in a tone not so careless as he aimed to make it, —

"You have seen my people, talked with them, and broken bread with them. What do you think of them?"

"I didn't talk much," she answered, with a little evasive laugh, at the same time giving him a half-regretful glance.

"Well, you saw them," he insisted. "What do you think of them?"

"Mr. Kaltenborn," she exclaimed, with a catching of her breath, "I dare not tell you."

Kaltenborn looked at her without surprise, but said quietly, "I can't imagine what you dare think that you dare not tell."

"I don't suppose I ought even to think it," she said, apologetically.

Another pause followed, in which Kaltenborn looked persistently away from her.

"You pity me," he said, abruptly.

"Why should I pity you, Mr. Kaltenborn?" she asked, with a slight start at the closeness of his shot.

"You should not," he returned, brusquely.

"I have not intimated that I do," she said, gently.

"You have not said it," he answered, "but you have looked it and acted it."

"This is not justice, Mr. Kaltenborn," she said, with some reserve. "You have no right to condemn me on any such intangible evidence as that."

"I am not condemning you," he answered, getting better control of himself, and speaking more evenly. "I speak for the very reason that it would not be just for me to conceal what I have seen so plainly."

"Suppose I were to tell you, in so many words, that I do *not* pity you?"

"You will not tell me so," he said, decisively.

"I have no right to pity you," she began, frankly. "I don't know that I do. But I must tell you, in honesty, and at the risk of wounding your pride, that if I were compelled to labor with such people, all my life, to mingle with them socially, to listen to their grievances, and to—to make myself popular with them, I should be the most miserable creature on the face of the earth. I don't think you are," she added, quickly. "And that shows that you are a great deal stronger than I am. But they are so cold, so narrow, so circumscribed in thought and ambition," she continued, plaintively,—"so ignorant, if I must say it, of all the finer and higher things of life." She looked at him with large, compassionate eyes, as though pleading her earnestness in extenuation of her bluntness.

"Suppose your lot were to be cast among them by choice?" he asked, half sadly, she thought.

"I can't conceive of it," she answered, positively;—"for *me*."

"Can you conceive of your lot falling by choice among the heathen, as a missionary?" he asked, and she fancied his tone half contemptuous.

"Hardly."

"Can you conceive of yourself as a nurse in a colony of lepers, destined never to see home or friends again, and to die a lingering, repulsive death?" She did not answer, and he went sternly on: "Can you conceive of your lot falling anywhere, by choice, where you would have to give up the pleasures and luxuries of life, or even its comforts, in order that the condition of your fellow-men might be improved?"

Again she did not speak, or look up, and he saw that she was hurt. He softened his voice, and continued: "My lot is not as hard as any of these. Do you not think so?"

"I suppose it is n't," she admitted, drawing her coat more tightly about her. "But could n't some one else do the work as well—or even better than you? You are so different from these people. You have ideals and aspirations that they never dream of. Are you not doing just what you warned me against the other day when you told about that Arabian mare of your father's on the stone-wagon? You are fretting and chafing—you must do it, under your limitations here—when another man, a man like Mr. Collins, your predecessor, who knows nothing better, would fall in with them naturally, without a thought of adjusting himself."

"If he is no better than they, how much could he uplift them?" he asked. His expression grew tender as he looked into her beautiful, thoughtful face; his eyes kindled as he watched her bite her lip; and the thought that behind those exquisite lineaments lay a soul that had confessed its unfitness for martyrdom gave his heart a wrench. "No," he continued, tearing his glance from her, "the blind must not lead the blind. And you must not pity me—if you do. You must

not make a saint out of me. That does me too much honor. My present life is of my choosing. I am thirty-five years old, and I have been in the ministry only a few years. The other years of my life were also spent as I chose to spend them — much as most men spend theirs, with perhaps certain advantages in my favor. I was not happy, though. My discontent drove me to a change, and I am happier now than I was then."

"How happy is that?" she asked, with a sweet, sympathetic smile.

"I have the happiness that comes from duty done," he answered. "It is not a leaping, shouting happiness — in my case, at least. My temperament forbids that, I suppose. I take life seriously, — too seriously, I sometimes think. But I feel, Miss Darlington, every day and every hour, that I am working shoulder to shoulder with God toward the completion of his great world-plan." He paused, not as having finished, but as being overwhelmed with the vastness of his theme.

Carol listened with half-awed eyes to this announcement of co-partnership with God. "And don't you ever have your doubts and discouragements?" she asked, admiringly.

"Too many times," he answered. "That seems to be a part of our finiteness. Weakness is the name for it. But when the sun seems to have set and darkness is on, the change is in me, I know, not in the world. That is always the same, widely speaking. We speak of the scowls and the smiles of the world, but as a matter of fact, the face of the world is serene. The scowls and smiles are our own."

"But you don't believe, do you, that one has to be a minister in order to be working for God?" she asked;

and the plaintive solemnity of her tones was sweet music in his ears.

"No, no," he said. "But *I* have to be. People have to be fed and clothed and educated — and hauled on railroad trains," he added, smiling, "and it's all as necessary, as divine, as caring for their souls. Yet I will confess that it seems to me that the minister's work is the highest. It certainly is the last. He finishes the product, as it were, and turns it over to the Master-workman for approval."

"It does seem higher," she said, reflectively.

"I wish I could make you understand just how I feel toward these people in my church," he began, enthusiastically, as if encouraged by her last remark. "I am not laboring to save them for heaven. I want to make them fit to live. I want to help them out of that narrowness which chills you. I want to remove those prejudices with which you are impatient. I want to lift them up, and give them the outlook in life that you have. They have not had the chance you have had; they have not come into their inheritance. As long as one man in this world is better than another, that other has not got his dues."

"Education will give them to him in time, I suppose," she suggested.

"I am only an educator. But the education you refer to, at least the higher part of it, is denied so many as yet. We must work to make good that deficiency — you and I," he added, impulsively, "and the rest who have been more fortunate than their brothers. There is a grandeur about the work, once you give yourself over to it, that you must feel to know," he continued, with glowing eyes. "It's as though you stood with one

hand in God's, and the other in man's." He paused as if he feared his enthusiasm might be carrying him too far, and then said, in an altered voice, "Good-night ! If I want you for another entertainment at our church, I suppose I can have you," he added, shrewdly.

"If you had asked me that half an hour ago, I should have said no," she answered, while he retained her hand momentarily. "And if you should ask me to-morrow morning, I might say no. My good moods are so terribly ephemeral."

"But you would say yes now?"

"Yes," she answered, simply, and she fancied that with those great, deep, earnest, passionate eyes upon her, she would have said yes to almost anything. "I wish you would come and see me, sometime, Mr. Kaltenborn," she added.

He may have taken the invitation for an after-thought, or a mere courtesy ; but she had been pondering the matter for several minutes.

CHAPTER XIX

ANCESTRAL AND OTHER SECRETS

WHATEVER he may have thought of the sincerity of her invitation, Kaltenborn called on Miss Darlington two weeks later. Her independence of thought and speech were very pleasing to his own independent nature ; and her self-confidence and hardihood, tintured with her father's worldliness, in a form softened by her age and sex, were refreshing to his vigorous and original mind.

But fully as gratifying to him as anything else about Carol — possibly more gratifying, had he been perfectly candid with himself — was a delicate, fleeting deference which she paid to his opinions, no matter how stoutly she contested them openly. So subtle was this homage — an indefinable lighting of her eye, a peculiar movement of her brows, a tense, listening attitude, a kind of suspension, as it were, of all her senses save that of hearing — that she seemed unconscious of it herself. It was certainly too intangible to be either openly accepted or rejected by Kaltenborn. Yet he wondered at times if it was not an amiable little trick, a sop thrown to his vanity.

As often as this suspicion recurred to him, he dismissed it as unworthy of himself and unjust to her. Why should she cater to his vanity, whether she thought

ill or well of him? And why, in truth, should she *not* show him a little deference? He had seen the world, he had read deeply in both men and books; and he was doing a work here in Ashboro that not every man could or would do.

He knew whence his sensitiveness in this matter came. It sprang from his perfect realization of the difference between her social position and his, the difference between their ideas of life, their hopes and ambitions. *He* knew that she had no real advantage over him in these things, but did she know it?

There was one other reason for his hesitating to call on her. Repugnant as the thought was, and squirm under it as he might, he knew there were people in his church who would not countenance any intimacy between their pastor and Carol Darlington. Her race-horse, her opera-going, her dancing, her card-playing, even her private-car parties, and very possibly her acting as auditor of the H. P., R., A., and S. — which some people thought mannish — were things which some of Kaltenborn's members could not overlook, or allow their pastor to overlook. He could easily understand this aversion on the part of his people, charming young woman though Carol was; he could even see that it was inevitable. But this did not make the bonds put upon him chafe any less.

Carol led Kaltenborn into the music-room, — a cozy place with its grate fire, and her favorite quarters. She introduced a young man sitting on the piano-stool as Mr. Winter, and then drew up another chair to the fire. While her back was thus turned, a shadowy smile, a mixture of amusement and apprehension, flickered over her face.

Her apprehension was not unreasonable. Winter was suave, graceful, smooth-tongued, discreet, and politic, though withal courageous and honest. Kaltenborn was blunt, out-spoken, conscientious to eccentricity, and full of unconventional notions. Winter was the proprietor of Ashboro Inn, and as such the owner of a bar. Kaltenborn was a preacher, and as such a public enemy of drink. It might very easily prove difficult to keep two such men on neutral ground.

Another thing embarrassed Carol a little, though she had a foolish desire to laugh at it, too. A custom of allowing certain favorites to smoke when they came in of an evening had grown up in the Darlington household. Both Mr. Darlington and Bert smoked from cellar to garret, and they had a sociable habit of dropping in on Carol's intimate men friends with cigars in their mouths. If the visitor happened to smoke, — and most of Carol's intimates did, — a cigar was invariably pressed upon him. In the course of time, these few young men got to bringing their own cigars, and to lighting them without the sanction of Mr. Darlington's or Bert's presence. Carol had resolved several times to prohibit this custom — she knew it was talked about; but as she did not take the matter to heart, the prohibition never came.

Mr. Winter was one of these privileged favorites, and at this moment a half-consumed cigar was sending up a tiny blue spiral of smoke from an ash-tray on the table, where Winter had discreetly deposited it upon Kaltenborn's entrance. However, there was nothing to say; at least, nothing that Carol cared to say. If Kaltenborn saw anything incongruous in a music-room full of smoke, he did not betray his perception by so

much as the movement of an eyelid. This tactfulness was something that Carol could admire, and she sank gracefully down into her chair, and folded her hands before her.

The men got along smoothly. Cash had never appeared to better advantage, Carol thought, and she resolved to tell him later that seriousness was a very becoming rôle for him. She saw, though, that he was taking his cue from Kaltenborn, and his imitation bore to Kaltenborn's virility about the relation that a painter's canvas bears to a landscape, — all unsightly objects left out, glaring colors subdued, extremes of light and shadow tempered. In short, Winter was just what he always was, though now out of his beaten track, — a gentleman, careful of the feelings of others, with a distaste for extremes, and no appetite for an argument.

Kaltenborn, on the other hand, was rugged and leonine. *His* landscape, though full of majestic mountains, was not without yawning abysses. There were grassy valleys, but also bleak summits, and through the verdure of the slopes, the granite thrust its hard face.

Carol was afraid of him — she admitted it freely to herself. Here in her presence, he was bitted and reined, as it were. But when he was free! When he took to his bosom the woman of his choice, if he ever should, and poured forth without reserve his inmost thoughts! Within him was a volcanic force that no woman could control, she fancied, and this same force would either lift some woman into the clear light above the clouds, or dash her pitilessly to earth. She saw in him, she believed, a constancy that knew no change, but also an iron will, — a helpless, unreason-

ing devotion to principle that would, without mercy, grind to dust the dearest heart that stood in his way. But now, a guest in her house, these lions were slumbering; and, besides, she was outside the cage — and she hugged the thought close that she was not their trainer. She could now look upon the quiescent lords of brute creation with equanimity, and even give them an occasional sly poke — with a good long pole.

After they had discussed politics, woman's rights, literature, and other subjects, Winter, who was beginning to look a little bored, said casually: "Your name is a familiar one to me, Mr. Kaltenborn, under the slightly modified form of Von Kaltenborn."

"Where did you ever see it, Cash?" asked Carol, curiously. She had fancied the name about as rare as the man.

"I don't suppose that Mr. Kaltenborn is even aware of the fact," answered Cash, with a broad smile, "that one of Milwaukee's most famous brewers is Fritz von Kaltenborn. His beer is considered by connoisseurs to be the purest in the United States."

It seemed to Carol that Cash was taking a poke at the lions on his own account, and with a dangerously short pole; but this only made the performance more interesting. She glanced mischievously at Kaltenborn. He looked from one to the other, as if to ascertain their intentions, and then answered briefly, but without offence: "Fritz von Kaltenborn is my father."

The blank faces of his hearers must have convinced him of their innocence. Carol gave a little "Oh!" and flushed, and glanced at Winter. The situation was delicate for a moment, and Winter extricated himself as gracefully as possible, perhaps, when he remarked, smil-

ingly, "Well, he makes a good honest brew, Mr. Kaltenborn. I can testify to that."

"As honest as any brew can be, I presume," answered Kaltenborn, quietly. "Doubtless some brews are more dishonest than others, but they are all dishonest enough. My father and I hold different opinions about that, of course. But when one sees an employé of a brewery draw thirty or forty or even fifty beer-checks in one day, as I have seen, and sees those checks turned in for as many big glasses of beer in one day, as I have, one begins to suspect that there is something insidiously dishonest about even the honestest brew, and that those who drink it will soon thirst again."

Though Winter had unwittingly opened the door of the closet containing the Kaltenborn family skeleton, he had no desire to stand and shamelessly look in, or urge Kaltenborn to rattle its bones. So after making a few admissions about the dishonesty of beer, he skilfully turned the subject until they were talking about horses. It was the first time during the evening that Cash had taken a stand upon familiar ground, and Carol was perfectly willing to excuse him, though Kaltenborn could not be expected to know much, if anything, about horses. Still, he might, she reflected, if he was a brewer's son.

Winter finally asked Kaltenborn if he was anything of a horse fancier. Carol doubted the happiness of such a question to a minister, and a poorly paid one at that, but Kaltenborn answered readily: "I used to be, and am yet, though I don't gratify the fancy any longer."

"Then you don't see any harm in horse-racing — that is, the racing itself?"

"That's a pretty complicated question, Mr. Winter," answered Kaltenborn, smiling, "and one that I could n't answer satisfactorily in a brief way. If it were not for the cruelty sometimes attending horse-racing, I will say that I don't think the sport itself would prove demoralizing."

After Winter had gone, Carol said to Kaltenborn, with something like reproach in her eyes, "Why did you tell us about your father? Don't you know that it may hurt you?"

Kaltenborn looked back into the softly solicitous eyes with a grateful glance. "Don't you know that I can't help it?" he asked, quaintly.

"You could."

"How?"

"By keeping still." She closed her own handsome mouth firmly to exemplify.

Kaltenborn looked into the fire. "You would have deceived him?" he asked.

"I should have deceived him," she answered, firmly.

"Then you *would* deceive, wouldn't you," he returned, as though a suspicion had been verified, except that he was half jesting.

"I believe there are times when the Recording Angel himself makes it convenient to be out for a moment," she answered, earnestly, in spite of her whimsical figure of speech.

"Would this have been one of the times, do you think?" he asked, half ironically.

"I think this is one of the times when a lie would have been the handmaiden of truth."

"I have heard that handmaidens sometimes deceive their mistresses," he observed, dryly.

"Without going too deeply into that question," said

Carol, laughing, "you have done just what I could have foretold. You have been guilty, sir, of a super-sensitiveness of conscience. You have impaired your usefulness — no matter how little — by an unreasoning adherence to principle. I am not a liar, and I despise lies and liars; but I should have lied then — if keeping still would have been lying, and I suppose it would. Why should you put weapons into your enemies' hands? People will hear of this thing. Mr. Winter will tell it to some one, sooner or later. You made no secret of it, and naturally he won't. Your church will hear of it, and there are people in your church, Mr. Kaltenborn, who will visit the sins of the father upon the son, and think it a Christian merit."

"Nobody knows that better than I," returned Kaltenborn, gently. "But, Miss Darlington, I want to tell you this." He sunk his voice until its suppressed power thrilled Carol through and through. "I don't believe that any human being was ever placed in an exigency which justified a lie. I don't believe that a lie ever yet did good, honest service. And I don't want *you* to believe that it ever did."

She looked up into his serious eyes quite meekly, and said nothing. He continued, reflectively: "I don't really regret the chance that made it necessary for me to tell that about my father. The secret was more dangerous in my hands than out of them. It has hurt me more already, I am sure, than it ever can again. It was making a coward of me. It was tying my hands. I did n't know — I don't know now — how many people in this town know that my father is a brewer. It is no secret outside of Ashboro, and some one here may have already heard it. If it's to be known — and such things

can't be kept a secret indefinitely — I want to know that it is known. Then I can meet the issue squarely. I can't fight in the dark, Miss Darlington, and that's the *only* place where I can't."

"I fear you are spoiling for a fight," she said, coyly reproving him. "But I forgive you. Men have to have a little of that now and then, apparently, or grow stale. But I tell you candidly, if you are going to tell *all* your secrets, you will have a hard row to hoe. You might begin with me, for practice," she added, piquantly.

"I will. I told Mr. Winter that I used to own horses. I'll tell you that I used to race them."

"Mr. Kaltenborn, I knew it!" she exclaimed, leaning forward with kindling eyes. "The first time I ever saw you, I knew you had n't always been a preacher. I don't mean anything uncomplimentary," she explained, quickly. "But I knew that you had seen more of the world than most preachers see — at least, more of one side of it. And I did n't think any the less of you for it."

"I can quite easily believe that," he observed, inscrutably.

She looked at him doubtfully, with a twinkle in her eye. "I don't know just how to take that, sir. You mean, I suppose, that as soon as I suspected that you had been worldly, I had a fellow-feeling for you. That is unkind. But — did you ever own any real good horses — as good a horse as Whitefoot, say?" she asked, curiously.

"I owned Queen Charlotte from her first year until she burst a blood-vessel at Fairfield," he answered.

Carol sprang to her feet. "You owned Queen Char-

lotte? You are joking, Mr. Kaltenborn!" she cried, sharply.

"No," he said, with unmistakable sincerity.

"Queen Charlotte was a great-aunt of my own dear Whitefoot!" she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "And you never told me! Wait a minute!" She left the room abruptly, and quickly returned with a small, framed picture in her hands. "This is one of my most treasured possessions." She laughed gaily. "Look at it! Look at your own poor, noble, dead Queen!"

Kaltenborn took the picture in his hands with a faint smile, and gazed some time at the long-bodied, clean-limbed racer. "She *was* a queen," he murmured, reminiscently. "I remember when this very picture was taken. It was at Louisville. I recognize the sheds in the background. I stood within ten feet of her, and held up a handkerchief to catch her eye."

"I declare, this is a perfect fairy tale, Mr. Kaltenborn!" exclaimed Carol, delightedly.

"The day before that mare died," he continued, soberly, "I refused twelve thousand dollars for her; an hour after she died, I gave her to a soap-maker for the hauling. I have thought a thousand times how that typifies the vanities of this world."

Carol was standing with her hand on the back of his chair, looking over his shoulder at the picture. Her eyes wandered momentarily to his foreshortened profile.

"The poor, beautiful thing!" she exclaimed, pityingly. She was silent a moment, and then began, haltingly, "Do you know, Mr. Kaltenborn, some people believe that horses go to heaven?"

"Barney Mitchell used to say so," he answered, musingly. "He was Queen's driver. The sympathy be-

tween him and her was remarkable, and the power he had over her was little short of marvellous. It was never more strikingly manifested than in the last race of her life. There were eight other entries. Queen got a bad start, but the pace that she and two other favorites set — Witchcraft and Peggy Hubbard — was so terrific that the three soon had the track to themselves. When they reached the three-quarter post, Witchcraft and Hubbard were abreast, with Queen two lengths behind. I had hopes, though, until I saw Mitchell drop his whip, — the only time he ever did such a trick in his life, — and then I put up my glasses. Mitchell knew the mare better than I did. By his voice, and by gently patting her haunch with his hand, he forced her to take up the gap between herself and the others. Then he got her abreast of them, and held his place until they were well down the stretch. By this time the mare was in a frenzy, and her eyes glared wildly. A hundred feet from the finish, Barney spoke her name, in a quick, sharp tone. She gave a terrific spurt, and shot under the wire a length ahead of Witchcraft, who got place. As she did so she fell to her knees, and doubled up in a heap from her momentum. Mitchell shot over her head, and landed twenty feet beyond. I supposed she had stumbled; but as soon as Mitchell had collected his senses and taken one look at her, he turned away with a face as white as chalk. He knew she was dying, and of all the jockeys and veterinarians that crowded around the fallen horse, he was the only one that did know it. Of course, we all saw it after a little. That scene haunted my memory for days," he added sadly. "There was an almost human pathos in Queen's eyes as she turned them on the crowd that pushed about her, as

though she knew she had done her duty, and had no regrets. When a veterinarian announced that she had broken a blood-vessel and could n't live an hour, I saw more than one woman burst into tears. She was a great favorite with women."

Carol was silent a moment, and then slowly walked over to her chair and sat down. When she looked up and said, in a subdued voice, "I love a good horse and a good race," her eyes were wet.

"Yet you have only seen the bright side of racing," said Kaltenborn, after a pause, which seemed to be in honor of the dead mare. "The reverse side of the stage is not more different from its front than the reverse side of a race-track from its front. If you could see the cut-throats, gamblers, card-sharps, and touts that swarm from one track to another; the lying, buying, stealing, and intriguing that accompany every race; the degraded characters that infest the stables; their profligate, soulless lives, their vulgar display of ill-gotten gains, and the coarseness of thought and speech in the best of them — if you could see all this, you would feel almost sorry for the beautiful, high-spirited animals that have to associate daily and hourly with them. And I am sure, too, that if you had once seen all these things, as I have, it would forever poison the pleasure you now get from a horse-race, just as it spoils mine."

"I know, in a vague way, of it all," she said. "That is, I have heard."

"Yes, as you have heard of the profligacies of ancient Rome or the bestiality of the Feudal Age. But that is very far from a comprehension of them."

At the door she said, with a twinkle, "The next time you come I won't make you talk breweries and horse-

rating. But it's so few preachers that *can* talk entertainingly on those subjects!" She paused roguishly, and Kaltenborn punished her temerity by giving her hand an added pressure.

Carol walked slowly back to the music-room, closed the piano, and then went on into the sitting-room, where the family all happened to be gathered at the moment — Bert smoking, Mr. Darlington buried in his paper, Ruth reading, and Mrs. Darlington picking over a basket of silk yarns. Carol was braced for an onslaught of raillery, for her various encounters with Kaltenborn had become a family joke, and this, his first call, could hardly be passed over. But not a word was said.

Carol settled down momentarily on a chair before going upstairs, and mentally compared the horse that one of Kaltenborn's parishioners had placed at his disposal with Queen Charlotte. She had smiled more than once at the ambling gait of the former with the rattling vehicle he drew. She never would again, she decided. She would be more likely to cry. The man that could come down from a Queen Charlotte to old Mr. Meeks's family driving-horse for conscience's sake was worthy of tears.

"No, Bert," began Mr. Darlington, with sanctimonious gravity, "I don't think your views on amusements are just orthodox. They are more Episcopalian than Methodistical. You hold that all innocent amusements are harmless; we hold that all harmless amusements are innocent."

Carol instantly saw the game, which Ruth's snickering would have betrayed in any event. She said nothing, and did not look up, though her cheeks slightly reddened. Bert smiled at his father's drollery, but refused

to become a party to it. Ruth, however, had no such scruples.

"Still, I don't just see, sir," she answered, in a mincing tone, "where the harm lies in a game of croquet."

"Are not the balls round, like a billiard ball?" demanded her father. "Do they not roll to and fro over the uneven ground by *chance*? It is the chance element that damns 'croquet.'"

Carol rose and walked toward the door with well-assumed dignity; but before she got out of the room her mouth began to twitch with suppressed laughter, and finally she was fairly shaking. Then turning and laying aside all pretence, she said, with a tantalizing gleam in her eyes, "Papa, if you only knew what we *did* talk about!"

"What?" demanded Ruth, instantly dropping farce for reality.

"You guess," retorted Carol, and disappeared.

Meanwhile Kaltenborn walked homeward. It was ten o'clock when he got there, and he had an hour yet to read. Half a dozen books lay on his table. He glanced them over, and found that he had no appetite for any of them. Yet he distinctly remembered laying down Bishop Foster's "Prolegomena" with regret when the hour for him to go to Miss Darlington's had come. He took Emerson out of the case—a favorite that seldom failed to soothe him; but he soon found himself turning the pages with his mind miles away.

Or was it only blocks away? No, it was not Miss Darlington, he decided. He was wandering in spirit through the great over-furnished halls and rooms of a palace overlooking the green waters of Lake Michigan,

the place he had once called home, and which his lonely old father yet called home. The picture stirred scarce a tender emotion in his bosom. The great castle-like pile, with its craggy, granite walls,—the model of which stood on the banks of the Rhine,—looked as cold and cheerless, in Kaltenborn's fancy, as the dark vaults in which was stored the beer that built it. He saw, too, in fancy, his father as he had last seen him in the flesh,—a stalwart, vigorous old man, with a face now as hard and grim as an iron mask, his finger pointing to the door, his firm lips saying, "Go, and come no more!" It was the day Kaltenborn had announced his determination to become a preacher.

Next, his dream-fairy carried him to Fairfield track again, where Queen Charlotte had died amid the bustle of stable-boys and jockeys, and hard-faced, diamond-decked "bookies," with their glaring shirt-fronts, "loud" ties, and plaid clothes. There was little here to tempt him to linger, and next he was back in his rooms at Heidelberg, a student again. Then, with the speed of thought, he visited successively his law-office, the parsonage at his former charge, and—the music-room at the Darlings', with *her*. It was Carol, perhaps, after all. Or was it only the life she stood for? And was there not a life somewhere between the two extremes he had known, in which he might find a place, and be neither cramped nor lost?

He tossed the Essays upon the table, and with his hands in his pockets strode gloomily up and down his study. He paused once and looked at the unfinished sermon upon his desk. As he read the last lines over aloud, in a bitter, satirical tone, he laughed half-scornfully. They sounded as false and hollow as a page from

a melodrama, and seizing the sheets, he made a motion as if to tear them in two.

"Have I got to fight this battle all over again?" he asked, savagely. Then, quickly ashamed of his weakness, he smiled, and laid the sheets gently down, and murmured, "I have a little touch of poison in my veins to-night, but I'll throw it off by morning."

CHAPTER XX

THE LEAVEN WORKS

IN the two months that followed, Kaltenborn called on Carol a number of times. His visits to her soon became the event of the week for him. He found himself looking forward to them ; and his mind often stole away from the sermon under his hand to that cozy room in the Darlington mansion, with its soft chairs, its genial grate-fire, its light, its soothing, hospitable atmosphere, and its charming mistress. That music-room was the one place in Ashboro where Kaltenborn allowed himself to expand ; the one place where he could lift the shroud from his dead past, and lay down for a moment the burdens of his living present. There he was not a preacher, but merely Stephen Kaltenborn. There no oracular significance attached to his words, for no admiring supporters were there to quote them, no malcontents to misinterpret them. In Carol he found an intelligent, if not always an assenting, listener, and their amicable tilts were as bracing to him as a draught of mountain air.

He received, too, as well as gave, and found it in this instance fully as blessed. Through Carol's eyes he looked into a world resembling a good deal the world he had renounced. He saw there much to disapprove, and much to admire. Carol, as a favored child of

fortune, vividly typified her little world, at its best and at its worst. She was worldly, but also broad ; perfunctory in religion, but tolerant ; lacking sympathy for the ignorant, but herself cultured ; shrinking from poverty, but still charitable.

Yet, for all this, Kaltenborn soon began to feel vaguely a sense of loss. The morning after an evening at the Darlington's, his tension was relaxed and his mind vitiated. An effort was required for him to swing back into the routine of his life ; and once back, he found himself weighed down with a most stubborn lethargy. He was assailed at times by an almost unconquerable aversion to his more homely duties, such as visiting the sick and settling differences between his parishioners. He found himself less elated by success, and more discouraged by failure.

The cause was perfectly plain to him. As he had grown more intimate with Carol, she had drawn him further and further into her life, and her pleasures and work and friends and ambitions had more and more taken up their conversation. This, too, not from any choosing of Carol's, or in opposition to Kaltenborn's wishes, but naturally, easily, and almost unconsciously. In the same measure his work and ambitions and pleasures had sunk out of sight, until at last he actually felt diffident about introducing into their conversation anything especially connected with his church.

A superficiality of thought, too, marked their intercourse, when he came to analyze it in the serenity of his study. That sledge-hammer insistency of argument which he had employed with Carol, when he cared nothing for her favor, had dwindled away to tack-hammer strokes. Not through any indifference of

his, but because he had come to believe, through some witchcraft or other, that sledge-hammers were not as genteel a tool to use in a lady's sitting-room as a tack-hammer. Carol, too, had changed. The sharp-pointed javelin and the cleaving battle-axe with which she had once ridden full tilt at Kaltenborn had been laid aside for mere toys of weapons, and their jousting had degenerated into a dull sham battle.

As between friends, this kind of intercourse was all right, from some people's point of view. But from Kaltenborn's, it was all wrong. He believed the friendship between him and Carol had to be intellectual or nothing. Anything else was impossible ; or, if possible, dangerous, and destined to end in vain regrets. He realized perfectly the gulf between her and him. Besides, he never expected to marry ; and if he did marry, his wife must be a woman who could further his chosen work. Carol Darlington was obviously not that woman. He had proved it more than once, not so much to his satisfaction, perhaps, as to his dissatisfaction. She was good, kind, pure, and high-minded ; but the idea of sacrificing her life for others had never taken hold of her, and probably never would. She even regarded such sacrifices as unnecessary and quixotic, and their very discussion seemed to chill and subdue her, when indeed it did not provoke her to impatience. This demonstrating of Carol's unfitness to be his wife had a very questionable fascination for Kaltenborn, and he displayed remarkable ingenuity in devising new tests for her. Indeed, one might have suspected that he was trying to find a test which she could successfully stand.

Yet the honesty and courage with which she clung to her convictions charmed him. The patience with

which she usually let him scathe her philosophy struck him as truly admirable, and her humility under his apparent assumption of superiority was an unfailing source of wonder to him. She would sit and listen to him — they were not always superficial — looking into the fire with an incredulous little smile on her face. Or she would sit in sober thought, or with her brows knit in a puzzled frown. At such moments, as Kaltenborn measured every feature of hers with his eyes, her firm mouth, her determined chin, her chiselled nose, just like her father's, her shrewd, intelligent eyes, her shapely head, with its broad, low brow, his heart sometimes melted with pity to think by how little she had missed greatness.

"Mr. Kaltenborn, you must think I am an awfully weak woman," said Carol, on one of these occasions. She spoke in a subdued tone, though bending a smile upon him. "You must have a dreadful opinion of my nobility. But, believe me, I could do all those things, if I only thought they were *necessary*. If I thought it would serve some great end, I believe I could die at the stake as bravely as Joan of Arc died. I could spend all my days in poverty, abject poverty, and be happy, if it were for some one whom I dearly loved. I am as sure of that as I am that I live. Do you believe it?" She gave him a steady, searching gaze, without lifting her head from its thoughtful inclination.

"I do," he answered. "I never thought you weak."

"What is my trouble then?" she asked, and there was something half-pathetic in her forced smile. "I know you believe there is something wrong."

"You can't learn that sacrifices *are* necessary," he answered, earnestly. "If you could learn that great

opportunities are lying every day in your path, awaiting noble, unselfish devotion on your part, regardless of cost, your trouble, trust me, would be gone."

She gazed thoughtfully at the floor, with a little doubting smile, the plaintiveness of which he had learned to love. "That sounds very familiar, Mr. Kaltenborn," she said, "but I know you would n't talk in that way unless you meant something. Tell me what sacrifice I can make to-morrow that will help some one," she continued, lifting her face resolutely, "and I will make it at any cost."

"I can't tell you," he answered, smiling at her frankness. "It is almost as much of a grace to see these things as to do them. But you keep a sharp eye to-morrow, and see if you don't discover something before twelve o'clock. But don't take it too seriously. Don't regard yourself as a martyr, or become quixotic, and take a wind-mill for a giant. Don't go around mortifying your flesh to no good end. The commonest flesh is too good to be mortified without reason, and I sometimes think that when it is white and tender it has a special claim for exemption."

Carol gave him a little wise look, as though this also sounded familiar, but as though she doubted this time whether it meant anything or not. Dropping her head slightly, as women do under fire of this kind, she said, quietly, and he thought disappointedly, "I did n't suppose you ever noticed such things."

"What, then, in this fair world of God's, did you suppose I would notice?" he asked, slightly resenting her tone.

"I did n't just mean what I said," she murmured, begging forgiveness with her soft eyes.

"I think God made such things to be noticed," he added.

"But in silence," she suggested, slyly, glancing up from under her brows as she worked her gown into little folds over her knee.

"I fancy you don't mean that either," he returned dryly.

"But you do notice them in silence, mostly, — don't you?" she asked, defensively.

"Whenever that's possible," he answered, gallantly.

She was silent for a moment, and then asked, as if suggesting a change of subject, "Is anything impossible with you men?"

"Nothing except you women," he returned, refusing to change the subject.

She slowly traced some imaginary characters on her chair-arm with her forefinger. "That spells 'foolish,'" said she, with a keen smile, "and it means us."

"You are a good speller," he said, with significant gravity.

When he arose to go, Carol said, "The next time you come, I will report on my efforts to find a sacrifice to-morrow, and this is a token of my earnestness." With just the least self-consciousness, she slipped into his buttonhole a rosebud she had taken from a cluster on the table. "Be careful that you don't crush it with your overcoat," she added, with almost maternal authority in her tones. She changed the position of the flower a little, as though he were a boy, and he felt a mounting happiness within which was indeed boyish.

He had just removed his overcoat at Mrs. Hicks's, when the old woman, in her slippers and wrapper, appeared in the doorway at the end of the hall.

"Brother Kaltenborn," she began, in her high, rasping key, "Mrs. Doolittle was took worse to-night, and they think she's dyin'. Her boy was here for you about an hour ago. I'd a-sent him for you, but I told him I did n't have the slightest idee where you was. I knew there wa'n't no church-doin's on to-night, and you don't belong to any lodge. I told him you generally left word where you could be found in just sich emergencies as this, but that you'd overlooked it to-night, I guessed. That's a pretty bud in your coat," she added, her voice falling confidentially. "Guess you must 'a' been around some greenhouse, because them roses don't bloom in everybody's house this time o' year. Put it in water, and it will open by to-morrow mornin'."

"I'll go around to Mrs. Doolittle's at once," said Kaltenborn, in his abruptest tone. He was in his overcoat again by this time, and he at once stalked out. As he walked rapidly along, he turned over in his mind the desirability of changing his quarters. This prying into the secret of his occasional absences at night was becoming very irritating to him.

Carol Darlington undressed that night with a thoughtful, preoccupied expression on her handsome face. Occasionally she smiled a little, but for the most part she was serious. Following a custom of hers, she put on a flannel robe and slippers, drew a fragile, brass-legged table close to the fire, and began a letter. But evidently she had mistaken her mood, for she sat whole minutes with her slim white hand pressed against her flushed cheek, and her eyes lost in reverie. Finally, though, she wrote rapidly for a time. The writing ran, —

"He is a character that you would simply revel in, and he would make a fine addition to your cabinet of curios, though you would have to enlarge it several feet each way, as there is nothing *small* about him. He has a very striking figure, too, which I sha'n't attempt to describe, except to say that you simply can't imagine him in a *dress-suit*. He has n't even a *dressy* complexion, for he's quite ruddy. (I can't say much there. My blowziness is still with me, and these cold, windy days are especially favorable to it.)

"He's a radical about some things, and I'm afraid he does n't like women very well. That's a great defect, of course. Ahem! But he may outgrow it—he's only thirty-five! If you could see him, Clara, you would either hate him or love him at first sight—you are so terribly absolute. I believe you would *love* him, though; so perhaps it is just as well for you not to see him, because he is not a *marrying* man, strictly. He does n't go in for society, either, so you would n't want him. I should just about as soon think of leading a grizzly bear through a chinaware exhibit as of taking him to an afternoon tea, for instance. Maybe that recommends him to you, though. Or have you outgrown that fearful unconventionality of yours?

"He thinks (I'm full of him to-night, for he was just here, and you have got to stand it) that a woman has n't any right to marry a man unless she can fathom all his ambitions and all that, and help him out with them. Can you do that for Tom? If not, my dear, it is my painful duty to inform you that your contemplated marriage is a mistake, and sooner or later will bring you to grief. But, dear me! what can a poor girl do? *He* says she ought to crush her love, for the man's sake,

and keep away from him. That's one kind of crushing that he does n't know much about, I fancy. And if a woman should do it, how much credit would she get from the very man she had done it for? You tell me, Clarissa dear, the next time you write."

This long spurt over, Carol's pen again lagged; and, abandoning the letter for the moment, she left the table, and sank down into the big leather chair. A pretty picture she made, with her queenly figure at rest, the toes of her red slippers just touching the fender, the mass of fair hair pillowed against the chocolate-colored leather, her half-closed eyes liquid and bright with nameless, unutterable thoughts.

She was not thinking of Kaltenborn either — not just then. She was thinking of her mother. Mrs. Darlington was the only deeply religious member of the family. Ruth's religious nature had not yet awakened; Herbert had no convictions; his father was indifferent or sceptical; and Carol herself was only lukewarm at the best. The family attitude toward the church was frequently a subject of raillery in the domestic circle. The rector of St. Paul's — and, later, Kaltenborn — also came in now and then for a good-natured thrust.

It was all done in a kindly, tolerant spirit; but to-night Carol wondered, in her unwonted tenderness, if this bantering had not more than once given her mother pain. Some things were too sacred for the most kindly jesting. From this she got to thinking of her mother's marriage, her wanderings with her young husband, her first babies. This period of her mother's life had always been very vague to Carol, but she knew the main facts, and now her kindled imagination clothed the skeleton with flesh. She was old enough now to put

herself in her mother's place, in those days of young wifehood ; and the fact that her mother had once been a young woman like herself, filled with the same glowing, rosy hopes ; that her mother had once been wooed and won, just as she, Carol, would some day probably be ; that her mother was then young and inexperienced and only a girl, — all this came to Carol to-night like a revelation, with a new and intensified meaning.

In this new light, she pictured her mother, then a young wife, striving with both hope and fear to turn her worldly young husband's thoughts upward. She saw her fail, in bitter but hidden pain ; saw her turning then, with hope springing up anew, to her babies, to plant in them in good season the spiritual seed which had but languished and died in the stony soil of her husband's nature.

Those babies, what were they now? — Carol asked herself. Amiable scoffers. The thought was inexpressibly touching to her, and she murmured, with tears in her eyes, "Poor little mother! How many times has your heart ached for us!" She rose, with a swelling bosom. In that moment she felt that never, so long as she lived, could she give her mother the least pain again. She started for her mother's room, for she wanted to look into her face, and see if there was any sadness there now. But remembering that her mother must be in bed, she paused. The next moment she was on her knees by the side of her own bed, with bowed head. It was not conversion. It was a tribute to mother-love, and it eased the daughter's aching heart.

When she rose, she murmured aloud, with a fluttering, yearning sigh, "If I could only feel as good and tender as this *all* the time!"

In the morning the rose-color was gone, but not forgotten. After her cold bath and five minutes of exercise with her clubs, she went downstairs, where she found the family already at breakfast.

"What was the theme *last* night, Carol?" asked her father, after a little, with a wink at Bert. "It must have been a tough one. You look pretty well tuckered out this morning."

Her father's joking words sounded harsh and cynical just then. "Papa, do you see anything particularly ridiculous in Mr. Kaltenborn?" she asked with dignity.

"I don't see anything ridiculous in him at all," protested her father, but with waggery in his eyes.

"Then why are you always asking what our theme was? You insinuate that we do nothing but engage in ridiculous theological disputes."

"Not at all, not at all!" returned Darlington, airily — and provokingly. "I am interested in what you talk about, of course. I don't want him to be putting any unorthodox ideas into your head. They say he's a little radical," he added, with a look of mock concern.

"Your solicitude about my orthodoxy is touching, papa," she retorted, sarcastically. "It's a wonder that the opinions of some of my other friends don't cause you uneasiness."

"No, I feel perfectly confident of your ability to take care of yourself with everybody except Brother Kaltenborn. He's a giant that could crush you as I would an egg-shell."

"I should like to see you and him in an argument once," said Carol, with a little threatening laugh.

"Oh, you would, would you!" exclaimed her father, defiantly.

"I'll bet there would n't be enough left of papa to draw a conclusion from!" cried Ruth, derisively, all her sympathies with Carol in this contest.

"Young ladies don't bet, Ruth," said her mother, reprovingly. Then she added quietly, but proudly, "Your father has held his own in debate with some very clever men, Carol."

"They think I'm a fool, Winifred," said Darlington, looking across at his wife. "Perhaps if I wore a Prince Albert and carried a ready-reference Bible around under my arm, they'd have some respect for me."

Carol bit her lip, and scarcely spoke again during the meal. Darlington saw that he had gone too far, and he attempted some conciliatory jocularly toward Carol, but she would have none of it. When the others had gone, Mrs. Darlington said, "Carol, don't you know your father well enough to know when he is joking?"

"I do, mamma. And well enough to know when he is not joking." She spoke in a hurt tone. "I don't care anything more about Mr. Kaltenborn than I do about any other preacher I know, but I won't have him ridiculed behind his back as long as he calls here and is received by the household as a friend. It is n't gentlemanly, and it is n't honest."

She walked down to the office in a frame of mind in ill accord with the glorious winter sunshine. She decided that she would treat her father coolly all that day, and maybe longer. At the head of the stairs she paused abruptly, and stood still for a moment. "Sacrifice No. One!" she murmured, and instead of going to her own room, she turned towards the president's door. She found her father reading the morning paper.

"Papa, I want you to take that back," she said, without sitting down.

"Take what back?" he asked in apparent surprise.

"What you said about Mr. Kaltenborn," she answered, with unusual earnestness.

"What did I say about Kaltenborn?" he asked in his most innocent tone.

"Please don't, papa!" she begged. "I swallowed my pride and came in here to effect a reconciliation, but I'm going out again if you are going to talk in that way."

He looked at her earnest face curiously, and with either surprise or admiration, or both. "What the deuce do you care what I said about Kaltenborn?" he asked, still manœuvring around the humble-pie at hand for him.

"I do care," said she, arbitrarily.

"Well, I did n't mean anything," he said, "and I take it back, if that's all you want. But I can't for the life of me see what there was in my remarks to take exception to. Here! There's a brand-new ivory paper-knife that a supply man left here yesterday. That shall be my pipe of peace. Trot on, now. You might kiss me, though, if you want to, just to show there's no ill-feeling."

"No, I don't think you are quite penitent enough yet," she answered, rising.

"You will — before the morning is over," he called after her. "Not a word now, not a word now!" he said, mysteriously, as she paused. "You will find out in time."

She stood a moment longer, and then walked slowly back to his chair, and, bending, placed her cool lips upon

his temple. "There, — if you are so sure about it!" she said.

About half-past ten Darlington came into her room in a great hurry. "Get on your hat and coat, and ask no questions," he said.

She did so, and he led the way downstairs, to where two carriages stood. Ruth and two of the largest stockholders of the road were in the first one; Bert and Elsie Clifford were in the second. Mr. Darlington helped Carol into the latter, and then got into the other one himself.

"What's it all about, Bert?" demanded Carol.

"The new compound-engine came in on 16 last night, and is in the round-house now," he answered.

Carol's eyes lighted with pleasure, and she gave Elsie's hand an ecstatic squeeze. "But why can't we have four people in our carriage, too?" she asked. "This looks selfish."

"We thought we'd stop at the hotel on the way down, and get Cash," said Bert.

"Well, we won't stop there," said Carol, promptly. "We'll drive up and get mamma, instead. Papa!" she called to her father, who was driving the other carriage, "You follow us! We're going after mamma first." To herself she said, "Not a sacrifice, but thoughtfulness." Darlington, though he called back something to Carol about her mother's not caring for such things, swung his horses about and prepared to follow her.

"Carol, you'd better go on without me," said Mrs. Darlington, doubtfully, as her daughter swept into the dining-room and stated her mission. "I have so much to do this morning, dear, that I'm afraid I have n't time."

"Take time," said Carol, autocratically. "Get on

your hat! That dress is good enough." And the mother, protesting that she did not know the first thing about a locomotive, was forced along by the daughter.

At the round-house the new engine, glossy with black paint and glittering with her brass-work, was surrounded by a knot of admiring engineers, firemen, and shop-hands, who fell back respectfully at the approach of the president's party. The great machine was truly a fascinating sight, towering high above their heads, with its crushing weight of iron and steel, its marvellous capacity for both speed and power, its beneficence in its appointed place, its appalling destructiveness when out of that place.

Charles Darlington nursed the mammoth, motionless, bloodless thing in his eyes, as a mother might her child, and laid his hand affectionately upon one of the cold drivers. There were engineers and firemen standing there who regarded a locomotive as little less than human. They loved it because of companionship with it in sunshine and storm, in midnight darkness and omnipresent danger; they boasted of its strength, and spoke tenderly of its weaknesses; they humored its moods, jealously refusing one day to push it too hard, the next day exultingly giving it its head, and encouraging it to do its best. Some were there who could hang their heads out of the cab window, night or day, and above all the roar of that mighty, on-rushing mass detect the rattle of a loose nut, as a jockey detects the first sign of fatigue in his mount. They could, in the same position, and by the sense of smell alone, detect a heated bearing, and thus avert, perhaps, the loss of life. They lived in an engine, with it, and for it; watched it grow old and decrepit and out-of-date; and at last saw it ground to

Love of the engine

pieces in a wreck, or, with tears in their eyes, saw it hauled away, no longer proudly heading the train, to be destroyed. Yet it is doubtful if one of these men had a warmer place in his heart for the beautiful, symmetrical machine now before them than had Charles Darlington. For he, too, had ridden in the cab.

After satisfying their eyes with mere bulk and glitter, the ladies were helped up into the cab, where Mr. Darlington explained to them the use of every attachment by which an engineer works his complicated machine, — gauges, cocks, levers, handles, valves, in bewildering confusion. Mrs. Darlington was thoroughly happy. The affectionate respect paid her family by the employes was sweet to her. She was proud of her husband's knowledge, and of Carol's quick perception. Bert's quiet, manly bearing, the care he took of Elsie, and the unflagging interest with which he explained the mysteries to her, also warmed his mother's heart. Even Ruth's keen inquisitiveness was not unnoticed by her. Carol saw it all, and it doubled the happiness of the occasion for her.

While the inspection was going on, old Porter Headley, the engineer to whom the new locomotive had fallen by right of seniority, leaned against one of the big drive-wheels, which stood three inches higher than his head. He was plainly doing his best to appear calm, even indifferent; but as a matter of fact he had come down at five o'clock that morning to see his new "girl," and had looked her over a dozen times since from tender to pilot. His young fireman leaned against the next driver with folded arms, in a rather badly done imitation of his grizzled chief.

"Well, Port, what do you think of her?" asked Mr.

Darlington, as the party drew together for a kind of summing up.

"Well, sir, from what I've seen of her," answered old Headley, casting his eyes along the boiler, as though that were all he had seen of her, "I should say she'll do."

"Do you see ninety miles an hour anywhere in her?"

"I can tell you better, sir, when I hear her pulse beat."

"She'll have to foot it at that rate," answered the president, "if you ever fall behind on the new schedule. She'll have to make sixty regularly between stations, and maybe seventy. Any of those improvements in the cab that you don't understand?" The president winked at Carol.

"None that I've seen," answered Headley, imperturbably.

The president stepped back a little to get one more comprehensive view of the engine, and shook his head admiringly. Turning to a portly man, one of the directors, he said, enthusiastically: "Bowers, I wish we had a machine of thirty years ago to set beside that, just to see the difference. It would look about as much like that as a hay-press. Drive-rod about a third as big as that, and about one-tenth as strong. Look at that boiler! A family could live in there, comfortably. Those old rattle-traps had a boiler about the size of a flour barrel, and little three-foot drivers. Then some smart man figured out that the bigger the drive-wheel was, the greater the speed would be, and they put on eight-foot drivers, just as they are doing in Europe to-day. That smart man forgot, though, that big wheels are useless without steam, and that plenty of steam will make a comparatively small wheel revolve fast enough to satisfy anybody but a mad-

man. Look at those cylinders ! That machine, Bowers," he exclaimed, pausing impressively, " is one of the noblest works of man ! "

" And one of the most expensive," suggested Bowers, with a grin.

" Expensive ! " snorted the president. " Why, man, nine thousand dollars is dirt cheap for that. Fifteen years ago you could n't have bought the steel in her for that. She costs a little more than the old style, I'll admit, but she'll save it in fuel in a year or two. And if we want to, we can cut our schedule from Ashboro to High Point to two hours. And if we do it, — and we *will* when the road-bed is ballasted up a little, — we'll scoop every through passenger for the South that now goes by the M. and A. What would you say to that ? "

" One hundred and two miles in two hours ? " asked Bowers, incredulously.

" Why not ? The road-bed will be all right, with a little ballasting. The only thing I'm at all afraid of is the rails. Sixty-five-pound rails were n't meant for exactly that kind of work, I'll admit. But I've seen it done before. I have done it myself. I did it down in Georgia, where they used to run trains so slow that the Georgia crackers could n't get their mules killed by 'em, and consequently quit raising mules. The train I put on killed seven of them the first run, in three hundred miles, and gave the stock-raising industry of that section a boom it never had before — and never will have again, I reckon."

" The last time you told that story, papa, it was five mules," said Carol, laughing.

" Mules are going up," retorted her father, instantly.

" I'll tell you, Charlie," said Bowers. " I like to see

home industries encouraged ; but if you are putting on nine-thousand-dollar engines and ballasting road-beds to give the stock-raising interests of this section a lift, I think I'll sell my railroad stock and buy a farm." He grinned on the crowd, but Carol, who knew the opposition her father had met in putting through his pet scheme of a fast train, suspected the director was more than half in earnest. Evidently, Darlington thought so too, for he said, shortly, —

"Don't you be in a hurry about that farm. I've known men to get scared before, and sell out when a few improvements were in sight, and I've noticed that they always bought back — at a sharp advance."

Bert and Elsie were standing a little apart. Elsie's big brown eyes were fixed upon the towering locomotive in almost childlike wonder.

"What makes you so quiet, sweetheart?" asked Bert, in a low tone.

"I am awed," she murmured, with an affectionate smile. "I never was so close to an engine before. There is something grand and impressive about the thought that man, little man, built that great machine that can run ninety miles an hour, and pull, your father says, fifty times its own weight. It's so motionless and so cold now ! Just to think that a little fire and a little water will hurl that vast bulk, with all its load of human freight, through the country at that terrible speed."

"It is an inspiring thought," said Bert, tenderly.

"I'm proud of you," she added, still more softly. "Proud to think that you have something to do with it all. Its vast strength is to be spent in your service ; and you hire these men and pay them and enable them to live in comfort, and you look after their families if

they are hurt or killed. You make the time-tables, and ~~hire the despatchers that handle the trains, and make the freight rates,—~~

"I *publish* them, Elsie." He smiled. "They have a habit of making themselves."

"Well, it's a great responsibility, anyhow," she returned. "And you ought to feel very, very serious about it."

"I do," he said, squarely meeting her glance.

It was decided, to old Headley's palpable disappointment, that the new engine should not be tested until the president's private car, then undergoing repairs, should be completed, which would not be for ten days or more. Mr. Darlington said he would then give a "speed" party, and do the thing up right. "And I would advise all people with bad nerves to send their regrets," he added, significantly.

"I move," said a director, with a smile at Carol, "inasmuch as it will be the first trip of the engine, and inasmuch as she will doubtless haul some of the most distinguished citizens of Ashboro, that Miss Carol Darlington be allowed to turn the first steam into the cylinders and to handle the throttle for the first mile."

"I second that motion," said Elsie Clifford, at once.

"Before the motion goes to a vote, I must decline the honor, with sincere regret," spoke up Carol. "Much as I should prize the honor, I believe there is another who would prize it more; and much as I should love to breathe the first breath of life into this noble machine here, there is another who would love it still more. Ladies and gentlemen, the honor belongs to Mr. Porter Headley — known more familiarly, the length of the

road, as 'old Port'—and I therefore suggest that his name be substituted for mine."

"No, no! No, Miss Darlington," stammered old Port, his affectation summarily knocked out of him by this unexpected act.

"Yes, yes! I insist!" cried Carol, and her suggestion was carried, to the complete annihilation of what little stoicism old Port had left.

CHAPTER XXI

A DANGEROUS PRESCRIPTION

KALTENBORN sat in his study awaiting the assembling of the official board of his church. He was low-spirited and unhappy. The afternoon had been spent in visiting the abject poor. He had gone from one squalid hovel to another, his nose filled with unwholesome odors, and his ears assailed with the cries of fretful babies, the whinings of peevish, sickly women, and the complaints of their shiftless husbands. There were not many such homes in Ashboro, fortunately, but such as there were seemed to fall mostly to Kaltenborn's lot.

To-day he had done the best he knew. He had spoken words of comfort to a mother whose worthless son had been gone two days, she knew not where. To one family he had promised food ; to another, fuel ; and clothes to a third. He had patched up, as well as such things can be patched, a quarrel between two families over the division line between their back yards, the fence having long since been used as fire-wood. He had explained to one perturbed sister the meaning of a sentence in his last Sunday's sermon, and had quoted authority to convince her that his teaching was strictly orthodox. He had sharply rebuked for his idleness a lazy lout to whom three children and a wife looked for bread. After all this, he had called upon the

church treasurer, to see if any money had been turned in to be applied to the large and growing deficit in his salary. The treasurer was apologetic and hopeful, but bankrupt.

Yet all this alone would not have served to depress Kaltenborn, for he was hardened to it. But there were divisions in the church. Two or three of the oldest members — and the best-paying ones as well — had taken offence at Kaltenborn's doctrine, and were systematically absenting themselves from services. Another and larger faction — though none of these had either withdrawn or threatened to do so — complained that his preaching was above their heads.

Kaltenborn knew that his sermons were pitched high intellectually, and he knew that his ideas were advanced. Hence the opposition of the conservatives and the dissatisfaction of the fat-witted were perfectly intelligible. But the problem remained how to preach as he had before — this he was determined to do — and yet reclaim the allegiance of the malcontents. In his trouble it was a source of strength and consolation to know that the younger members of the church were with him as a unit almost. After all, they were the ones he was preaching for and working for. The grayheads were past remoulding, for the suns of many summers and the frosts of many winters had set them hard and dry.

The official board had been convened this evening to discuss the advisability of calling an evangelist. Or, rather, the board had convened itself, for Kaltenborn was opposed to the project. The methods of the ordinary evangelist were exceedingly distasteful to him. The evangelist's ranting, his crudity of speech, his appeals to the emotions, his lurid pictures of hell,

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his melodramatic and harassing accounts of wickedness, his marvellous tales of conversion — all these Kaltenborn despised. Consequently, he had done all he could, in a quiet way, to discourage the idea of calling an evangelist. His efforts had been in vain, though, and he knew to-night, before a single member of the official board entered his study, that an evangelist would be called.

This thought also added to his loneliness and to the sense of ingratitude and injustice under which he smarted. As he meditated on the sacrifices he had made to preach, on the loftiness of purpose with which he had come to this church, on the zeal with which he had been fired, and then thought of the results, of the narrowness and bigotry with which he had been assailed from different quarters, he reached the dregs of his bitter cup.

In this crucial moment, when life seemed a failure and all his sacrifices vanity, a sweet, strong, sympathetic, womanly face floated across his mental vision, and smiled at him encouragingly. It was Carol Darlington's face — etherealized and spiritualized, but hers just the same. The phantom thrilled him, in that susceptible moment, with a bewildering joy, — so bewildering that he suspected its legitimacy. But casting his scruples aside, he put behind him the stern realities of the hour, and relinquished himself to his seductive fancy.

Between his mental eye and the squalid homes of Railroad Street were interposed the luxurious warmth and glow of that big house on the brow of the hill. The poor, stooped, angular, hollow-chested women of the afternoon faded away like an ugly dream, and in

their place stood one of supple, softly rounded figure, showing the graceful lines of young womanhood, and elastic with life, health, and happiness. Her low, vibrant laughter soothed his ears; her glorious eyes, so worldly-shrewd yet so deep and tender, beamed upon him their mischief, humor, joy, solicitude, and—in this fanciful moment—a something else that clutched his heart like an iron hand. Then the door-bell rang.

It was a trustee. The rest came singly or by twos and threes. The early ones waited for the later ones in ominous silence. By half-past seven all were present, for some of them lived in the country, and wanted an early session. Kaltenborn, chairman *ex officio*, called the meeting to order, though it was already as orderly as a group of statues. The others arose one by one and set forth their opinions. Their unanimity was striking. The church had not had an evangelist for several years, they said; a lack of spirituality was lamentably evident, especially among the young. Without reflecting on their pastor, who was working according to his light, the church needed stirring up. An attraction was needed which would bring outsiders within reach of the Word. The insiders themselves needed the *Gospel*, "the good old-fashioned Gospel," as Trustee Hackett put it, "writ in the Holy Scriptures." The Gospel was good enough for his father and for him, and ought to be good enough for his children. A little fire-and-brimstone was not a bad thing, now and then, another brother said. Without complaining, he did n't think Brother Kaltenborn gave the people enough *Hell*. A little of that would often do more than a great deal of Heaven. It was like salt in the cattle's fodder.

Kaltenborn had prepared himself for a vigorous oppo-

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sition ; but at the last moment the futility, as well as the impolicy, of such a course was too apparent. When his turn came, therefore, he rose and stated that he could not agree with much of what had been said. But if, in its collective wisdom, the Board saw fit to call an evangelist, he would graciously submit to its judgment, and take steps at once toward securing a good man. His acquiescence evidently took the others by surprise. It just as evidently also created a better feeling toward him. The trustees promptly agreed to leave the matter entirely in Kaltenborn's hands ; and by a little after eight o'clock the last one of them had gone.

Kaltenborn looked at his watch, then at his books, and then at his sermon. He had called on Carol only a few nights before, and he was not in the habit of calling on her oftener than once a week or once in ten days. After a little thought, though, he abruptly rose, put on his overcoat, and walked out. His hand was yet on the door-knob when Mrs. Hicks called sharply, —

"If anybody comes and asks where you air, Mr. Kaltenborn, what shall I tell 'em?"

"That you don't know," he answered, grimly.

As he walked along he called to mind, with the incredulity with which one recalls a harsh or unkind deed of one's own, that he had half promised himself the night before to wean himself from Carol Darlington. To-night the thought was monstrous to him, and he put it away with a fierceness worthy of one of his Viking ancestors.

Carol was out, attending a directors' meeting, Mrs. Darlington said. "But you must wait for her," she added hospitably. "They expected to be home by eight o'clock. The meeting was called early, on ac-

count of the concert, you know, though Carol herself is n't going ; and as she will be left alone, I have no doubt she will be doubly glad to see you. I can't imagine what keeps them."

Kaltenborn waited, gladly enough, until Carol came, with her father and brother. All three were in prime spirits. Carol's face was flushed with merriment, and she tugged at her gloves in a listless, relaxed way, as though she had laughed herself tired.

"Mr. Kaltenborn, we have just come from a directors' meeting, which explains our levity," said Carol, giving him her hand, with her glove half off. "They are always worth the price of admission to a comedy, but to-night was especially good. I must tell you about it — if you will never tell. The new engine was the cause of it all. You have read about that compound-engine, of course, in the paper. Papa had a very nice article in it — modern improvements, progressive railroad president, and all that." She looked at her father with teasing eyes, and then, her mind evidently reverting to the directors' meeting, she gave another little shriek of laughter.

"Well, tell your story," said Darlington, smiling broadly himself.

"First, though," Carol continued, "I want to tell Mr. Kaltenborn that he is herewith invited to take a ride in the president's new private car, behind our new engine, next Thursday, at ten o'clock in the morning. Dinner will be served, and you must lay your plans to be gone at least six hours."

"I thank you very much," said Kaltenborn.

"I join her in that invitation, Mr. Kaltenborn," said Darlington. He added humorously, "A preacher is

about as handy a man on such an occasion as a good surgeon."

"Papa has such a delicate way of setting forth to his guests the pleasures of an affair like this," observed Carol, ironically.

"Go on about the engine, dear," said Mrs. Darlington. "We must be going."

"Well, it seems that papa gave some of the directors the idea that the engine would cost only about eight thousand dollars, whereas —"

"I did n't give them the idea at all," interrupted Darlington, emphatically. "I told old Whitesides, in plain English, that it would cost between eight and nine thousand."

"Anyhow, Mr. Whitesides got eight thousand into his head," continued Carol, jauntily, "and when papa handed in an invoice to-night amounting to \$9,129.52, there was quite a commotion in Mr. Whitesides's neighborhood."

"That man is as complete an ass as I ever saw," broke in Darlington, in disgust.

"He insinuated as much about papa," Carol went on keenly. "He said he had been overridden long enough; that buying such an engine was a shameful waste of money, and moreover ridiculous in a road the size of ours, and that the H. P., R., A., and S., just on that account, was the laughing-stock of half the railroad officials in the country. Then papa arose, perfectly cool and calm," — she gave her auditors a roguish glance, — "and he and Mr. Whitesides pranced back and forth for twenty minutes like two bears in a pen, until finally papa suggested that if Mr. Whitesides's stock did not pay him as good a rate of interest

as he could get elsewhere, he could easily find a purchaser for it."

"I hoped to egg him on to say he wanted to sell," explained Darlington. "I'd have made him an offer in a minute. I'd like to get him out, anyway. He's a millstone around everybody's neck."

"They kept this up," Carol resumed, addressing Kaltenborn and her mother, "until positively everybody was roaring with laughter. It was simply *too* ridiculous!" Her voice caught in another convulsive laugh, giving her pause, while her father looked his dissent of the thing's having been ridiculous, but said nothing. "Whitesides said that running one hundred miles of railroad was not the biggest job on earth, though some people seemed to think so. Papa said Whitesides would think so, too, if he ever tried it. Whitesides got back by saying that he hated to be tied to a one-man concern; and papa said, very sarcastically, that it made all the difference in the world who the man was; that he himself would hate to be tied to some one-man concerns, looking hard at Whitesides."

"I did n't!" said Darlington, laughing.

"Whitesides retorted by saying that he hated to see dividends cut down and good money squandered to carry out a lot of pet schemes that had nothing but show and tinsel to them," Carol ran on. "Then papa asked him again why he did n't sell his stock, if dividends on it were so reduced."

"I was a fool to argue with him," commented the president, briefly.

"If you could call it arguing," said Carol, slyly. "But on the whole, papa behaved so courageously and so temperately — for him — that I took him down-

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town and bought him a box of cigars." She glanced at a rectangular package on the table.

"That's what kept them!" smiled Mrs. Darlington at Kaltenborn.

"You will notice, Mr. Kaltenborn," observed Darlington, jocosely, "that I went along to help her select the brand. It's a precaution that married life has taught me."

After the others had gone, Carol settled down in her chair, with a cozy "How are you to-night?"

"I don't feel so good," answered Kaltenborn.

"You don't look so good, either. You look tired. What you need is a conscientious, disinterested woman — something like myself — to diagnose you now and then, and prescribe for you. Now, to-night you are plainly disturbed about something. To overcome that condition, I prescribe one —" Withholding the word, she rose, with a significant expression, tore the wrapping off the box on the table, and with some difficulty pulled the lid up. "*—cigar!*" she concluded, holding the rich, black Havana up between thumb and finger. Her eyes flashed him a challenge.

"Do you mean it?" asked Kaltenborn.

"Certainly I mean it," she said. "Did n't you tell me that you used to smoke?"

"I also told you I had stopped."

"And you also admitted that you enjoyed it just as much as ever," she retorted. "Here's a match. I'll strike it for you."

"No, don't," he said, wistfully. "I must not smoke it."

"But I *want* you to!" she exclaimed, imperiously.

"No."

"Please!"

"No."

"I shall be very angry if you don't," she threatened.

"I can't help it," he answered, laughing slightly.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked, pausing in her onslaught.

"Nothing, except the witchcraft of a beautiful woman."

"Do you think it would be wrong to smoke that cigar?" she demanded, evading his compliment.

"Not in itself."

"Do you think it would set anybody a bad example — me, for instance?"

"No."

"Then why would it be wrong?"

"Because you would think less of me for it," he answered, seriously.

"Would you call that a wrong?" she asked, significantly, after a pause.

"I should."

"Why?"

"Because to have you think less of me would do me great injury. It would impair my power for usefulness," he answered, steadily.

Again Carol paused thoughtfully, her eyes darkling with excitement of some kind. "I can't pass over praise of that depth and sincerity," she finally answered, candidly. "I believe you, and I feel myself honored. But you were never more mistaken in your life, Mr. Kaltenborn, than in supposing that I would think less of you for smoking that cigar. Why should I? I know you don't number me with those people who think a preacher ought to be denied the good things of life, just because he is a preacher. And you certainly don't

believe that I see anything intrinsically wrong in smoking, when my father and brother both smoke. And you can't think that I am trying to—to test your strength, or anything like that. Do you?" she asked, abruptly, as though it might be possible.

"I could n't think that," he answered.

"Because I simply have a curiosity to see how you would look in the place of other men. I want to see how you would look at the end of a cigar, as I heard a reformer facetiously put it once," she added, more lightly. "Papa and Bert look so comfortable and oblivious to care when they are smoking, that I wondered if you would too. I simply can't imagine you rolling a cigar between your teeth," she continued, laughing, "and squinting your eyes to keep the smoke out, and sending a puff half-way to the ceiling. *Can* you do it? I don't believe you can. Please show me. How can you refuse, when I beg in this way?" she asked, with arch chiding.

"Because I know it is best."

"Then you *are* a crank, after all!" she exclaimed, dropping her outstretched hand. "Just as much as any of them, at heart." She might have been jesting, but she was not at all surprised, nevertheless, to see an ominous light come into his eyes.

"If by a crank you mean a man who will defend the dignity of his office against the whim of a woman, I am one," he answered, dryly. "If you mean the slave of a prejudice, I am not one—as I shall show you."

Before she quite realized his purpose, he had taken the cigar from her fingers, and bitten off its end. Then recovering herself, she exclaimed, indignantly, "Do you suppose I would allow you to smoke it *now*?"

And forgetting herself momentarily, she reached for the cigar.

He quietly intercepted her hand ; and, taking hold of her wrist, easily held her off. "Would you use force?" he asked in surprise. She at once withdrew her hand, and sat down stiffly. Kaltenborn lit the cigar, tossed the match into the grate, and silently smoked, without vouchsafing her a glance.

She was sorry, but also hurt, and a little bewildered. It was hard for her to realize, too, that she had been handled in this rough, arbitrary manner. She watched him with steady, disapproving eyes, and once her lips curled scornfully. He smoked on, and though he did not roll his cigar or squint his eyes or blow smoke ceilingward, after the manner of the Darlings, father and son, yet he certainly looked oblivious enough.

"Mr. Kaltenborn, you must apologize for the tone you used to me," she said, in a firm voice, but she trembled to her knees.

"Miss Darlington, if I thought I had been rude to you, I should apologize willingly," he answered, rising. "But I cannot apologize for words or tones that I thought, and still think, justified by your remark."

"Do you refuse?" she asked, faltering.

"I refuse," he answered, respectfully.

The blood slowly ran out of Carol's face until it was as white as marble. "Do you know what that means?" she asked, in a voice that distinctly trembled.

"Yes. It means that our intercourse must cease," he answered, bluntly.

He stood with his hand on the back of his chair, apparently as hard and insensible as a man of stone. In reality, his heart was aching. He knew she felt hurt,

and that she believed an apology due her. Yet it had been refused, and now the alternative faced her of dismissing him or of abdicating her rights. He suspected that dismissing him meant something to her, and he could not but sympathize with her in her trying position. Still, he believed that he was right, and his ruthless conscience was fully aroused. He did not know why he stood there so long. He did not want to see her surrender, and he could not himself surrender. Yet something that rode down his reason as the north wind rides down the zephyr held him fast.

"Good-bye!" he said at last, but made no move to go.

She did not answer or lift her eyes.

"Good-bye," he repeated, shifting his position.

She lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, and held it there. The movement touched him.

"Miss Darlington," he began, in a voice that vibrated with feeling, "if you think that I, for the sake of gratifying a wounded pride, or for the sake of displaying a theatrical firmness, can give up our friendship, you are doing me an injustice. If you think that I spoke to you without respect, you are mistaken. Yet your words were sharp, very sharp."

"Then I beg your forgiveness," she murmured.

"You have that already," he answered. "And if I have wounded you, I will say that nothing was further from my thoughts, and that I am very, very sorry, and I beg *your* forgiveness."

"I forgive you — with all my heart," she murmured again. He lingered a moment, as if uncertain of his next move, and she said, "Sit down." When she had touched away the last of her tears, she lifted her face, and gave him a confused glance.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Kaltenborn," she began, remorsefully. "Such a scene might better have taken place in the kitchen, and it was my fault."

Kaltenborn flushed, and answered gravely, "It takes two to make a quarrel."

"Oh, we did n't quarrel!" she exclaimed, recoiling slightly.

"That's what it would have been called in the kitchen," he returned. "Perhaps it was not quite that bad."

"It was bad enough, anyhow," she answered ruefully. "But we'll forget it; we'll never speak of it again, and — I'll never ask you to smoke again."

"And I'll never smoke again," he said, emphatically. "It was a piece of bravado worthy of a boy."

"I did n't think a little thing like a cigar could cause so much trouble — outside of the nursery," she continued, now smiling a little.

"It's the little things that cause most of the trouble," answered Kaltenborn. "But, a cigar or a kingdom, it would have been the same. The cigar merely started *us*."

She was silent for a little, looking abstractedly into the fire. A trace of mist was still in her eyes, giving her a subdued, tender appearance.

"Suppose you had gone away angry, Mr. Kaltenborn," she said at last, frankly meeting his eye. "It's a terrible thing to destroy a friendship. I think a friendship is the sacreddest thing on earth. When I think of all the good we might do each other; and how we might sometime, just by our influence, save each other from some false step; and then think of our going through life — through *life*, till we die, without

seeing each other again, all because of that miserable cigar, it almost unnerves me."

He smiled sympathetically into her glistening eyes. "I am glad you can feel so deeply on the subject. But we have stood the test, and if our friendship is ever dissolved, it will be by something greater than a cigar, or the pride or anger that a cigar can provoke."

"What do you mean?" she asked, uneasily.

"Oh, nothing in particular," he answered, rather hastily. "Only, if anything ever should arise to separate us, we could always think of each other kindly, and make the recollection of our friendship serve us instead."

"But what could separate us?" she asked, still dissatisfied.

He was silent a moment, and then answered, "My leaving Ashboro, for one thing."

She looked at him sharply, as though questioning his candor, but finally accepted his explanation.

When Carol reached her room, she found herself in a tremulous condition. Her muscles twitched, flashes of heat passed over her face, and her pulse throbbed in her ears. These purely physical phenomena bewildered her not a little, and frightened her somewhat. She feared she was going to be sick. A glance in the glass showed her a pair of intensely bright eyes and deeply flushed cheeks. That all this had any connection with the scene downstairs, she at first had not the remotest suspicion; and when the truth flashed over her, she gave a little gasp, and sank down into a chair confounded. Then, in her relief, she emitted a little hysterical laugh, and exclaimed aloud, "Why, you absurd, ridiculous creature!" She quickly

arose and looked into the glass again, this time with a flush the source of which she well knew. The beautiful image in the glass seemed to smile at her first, so she smiled back, with a strange joyousness, and leaned forward and kissed the phantom's red lips. The act left a little vaporous trace upon the cool glass, and this she quickly and guiltily erased with her handkerchief.

Ruth stepped into the room, just home from the concert, with her wraps still on. Carol fully expected her sister to say something about her flushed condition, but Ruth gave no sign of seeing anything out of the way, and began to talk of the concert. To her own surprise, Carol listened attentively to her sister's criticisms, but she was thinking at the same time what a trifling thing a concert was, and rather pitying Ruth for being so easily amused.

Her mental activity continued long after she had gone to bed, — increased, if anything, — and the witches of the pillow wove their most tangled spells in her brain. In her condition, so highly favorable to imagination, so utterly destructive of judgment, the scene in the parlor seemed the most natural thing in the world. She reacted it time and again, until, on the borderland between consciousness and unconsciousness, she saw Kaltenborn's grave face close to hers, felt the pressure of his hand upon her shoulder, and distinctly heard him say, "Kiss me, love!" So vivid was the fancy that for a moment she struggled to escape him, then suddenly found herself wide-awake, sitting up in bed, with a wildly throbbing heart.

Long after Carol had gone to sleep Kaltenborn sat in his study, neither writing nor reading. He, too, was reacting that scene. And she had cried! That one

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thought went plunging down the harp of his senses until it sprung the last, deepest, most resonant chord. How easily he could love her! Just to let go of himself! Just to forget that he was a preacher, pledged to a life of comparative poverty; just to forget that she was rich, and loved the pleasures of the rich. Just to remember that he could go back to the brewery, where his father, once assured that his son had seen the error of his ways, would welcome him with open arms. Just to remember that she was beautiful, good, pure, noble, and constant. But—some things he could not forget, and some things he had vowed not to remember.

CHAPTER XXII

THE "SPEED" PARTY

ON the morning of the new engine's trial — an exquisitely bright, bracing morning — a mixed crowd of Ashboroans jostled one another good-naturedly on the platform at the station, swarmed curiously around the locomotive, and streamed through the president's private car. Busy merchants were there, stealing a moment from their stores, and smiling at each other for their curiosity; women and children, frankly enjoying the scene; shop-hands and trainmen, visibly proud of the display and inclined to be a little patronizing in explaining things to outsiders; directors and officials of the road. Work was suspended in the railroad offices for the time being, and the clerks and telegraph operators came down and mingled with the other spectators.

At each end of the glossy, newly painted palace-car of the president — marked "Winifred," in bright gold letters in an oval panel on the side — stood a dignified colored porter in a brand-new, brass-buttoned suit of blue, courteously restraining the throng of sight-seers from pushing. All the early morning, while the car yet lay in the yard, butchers', bakers', and grocers' wagons had rattled to and fro over the tracks, until the refrigerator in the kitchen was packed with an appetiz-

ing store. But now, at almost the last moment, a belated cart dashed up to the rear of the car with further supplies.

"Judge," the cook, a Herculean negro, whose crow-black seemed even blacker by contrast with his cap and suit of immaculate white, bustled out from the kitchen to the platform with a grandiose air, and took charge of the goods from the cart, at the same time pompously reading the delivery-boy a lecture on his tardiness. No one, however, seemed to take any offence at Judge's imperiousness; and when he again emerged from the car, and swaggered down the station platform, a half-head taller than the tallest man there, it was evident that he was a favorite. His versatility was astonishing. To the ladies and gentlemen who bowed and smiled at him, he was the essence of respect and humility; but no sooner did he enter a group of his black associates than he began to strut like a turkey-cock. They, in turn, hung upon his patronizing utterances as they would upon the words of an oracle, and guffawed at his jokes, and altogether spoiled the black rascal.

The train consisted of the president's car, a day-coach, — which served the double purpose of ballasting the train and accommodating some of the employés, — and the locomotive. The last glistened in the sunlight like a war-horse of old full-panoplied for the fray. The fluttering flags and bunting might have been the colors of the knight-errant's fair lady; the air-pump, like a great heart, seemed to thump with suppressed excitement; and the burst of steam from the hard-pressed safety-valve which occasionally made the bystanders jump, was not unlike a mighty equine snort. Old Port, in a spotless sheathing of overalls, stood at the cab step with

folded arms. In honor of the occasion, his flannel shirt, usually flaring open on his grizzled chest, was fastened at the neck with a neat blue tie. His attitude and his expression were impressive, and seemed to say that the iron monster upon whose haunch he so familiarly leaned, and at which the crowd was gazing in admiration and wonder, was but a plaything in *his* hands.

Next to him stood his wife — a timid little woman — and his blooming daughter. Mrs. Headley plainly regarded her husband as the hero of the occasion. Her eyes shifted from him to the crowd, and back again, as though connecting the two ; and when the president of the road hurried by and familiarly saluted her husband, her withered cheek glowed with pride, and she was too self-conscious for a moment to face the throng. Her daughter, however, stood by with a rather mischievous smile on her pretty Irish face. But if no man can be a hero to his valet, by how much less can he be one to his quick-witted daughter? Still Port had other admirers than his wife, especially among the round-house and shop employés, who had been given a couple of hours off, and among the train-crews who were off duty. These men circled round and round the locomotive, pausing for minutes at a time to finger and discuss a nut, or oil-cup, or valve.

Old Port had a distant, exclusive look in his steel-blue eyes, as though nothing near at hand was worthy of his attention. But there was one object near at hand at which he furtively stole a glance now and then. This was a group near the head of the engine consisting of the president and his family, Elsie Clifford, Miss Dane, Winter, Kaltenborn, and one or two others. The rest of the party, among them several directors, the

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mayor of Ashboro, an alderman or two, and several other representative citizens, was scattered down the platform.

The president was the personification of energy and good nature. He carried himself as uprightly as a young corporal on dress-parade, and stepped as briskly about; his eyes constantly twinkled, and his smiles reached everybody. Occasionally, however, he gathered his brows in a business-like frown, as if to remind the others that this was not *all* a holiday, and that beneath the festivities lay a deep and useful purpose. Especially was this frown visible when Mr. Whitesides was near.

Carol, for once, did not share this commercial spirit of her father. Her happiness was unalloyed. It sparkled in her eyes, played in smiles around her red lips and regular teeth, rang in her laughter, and betrayed itself in her springy step. She wore a hat with a single feather stuck in it at a rakish angle, which accented her jaunty, careless air. Her skirt was a rough plaid of bright, warm colors; and Kaltenborn, who seldom noticed a woman's dress, thought she might have hunted through the dry-goods emporiums of the world without finding a pattern more in harmony with her mobile, athletic carriage. As she gracefully turned and shifted herself from one position to another, in mere exuberance of health and strength, there was at least one observer who thought the sight the fairest of the occasion.

Yet Kaltenborn perceived a shade of reserve in Carol's attitude toward him. She talked to him freely enough, though, — so freely, in fact, that he saw she was fending him off by that method. She talked of the engine, the private car, old Port, Judge, the flags, the dinner, everything and everybody, until he found it difficult to slip

in a word himself, and utterly impossible to broach anything personal, had he been so inclined. He knew the cause of this, for he had not seen her since their little scene over the cigar. Her demeanor both pleased and displeased him. Regarded as one of those little defences which women throw around their hearts, even against the man they secretly love, — yea, because they love him, — it pleased him. Regarded as a warning that there must not be another such intimate approach as he had made before, it displeased him. He himself had said there must not be such another approach, yet he did not want her to say so.

Finally the group started slowly down the platform, but paused near old Port as Mr. Darlington stepped forward with a slip of paper in his hand.

"I am going to be my own conductor to-day, Port," he said briskly. "There's your schedule. It puts us into High Point at 12.15, and you won't have to run over fifty miles an hour at any time to make it. I have a little theory I want to test. Besides, I don't care about burning out any of those new journals on my car. Coming back, though, Port," and he gave the veteran a dark smile, "you will have a free track and no responsibility. We expect some running then."

"You will get it," answered Headley, grimly.

As her father moved on, after a few minor directions, Carol said to the engineer, with an excited eye, "Mr. Headley, I want you to give my father his fill of speed for once."

"I guess that would be pretty hard to do, Miss Carol," smiled the old man, kindly. "But I'll give him all I can — rememberin' that you are aboard," he added, with an almost tender gallantry.

"You see," Carol explained to Kaltenborn, as they walked along, "papa has got all our engineers in a chronic fever about speed by telling them some of his wild West experiences. Once he came down a Rocky Mountain grade, five miles long and sloping like a cellar-door, — so *he* says, — on a flat-car with a broken brake-chain. Half-way down, with the chances about even of his ever getting all the way down alive, he *lit his cigar*, though the wind was going by him, so he calculates, at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. He says that he was n't a bit scared, and that he enjoyed the trip thoroughly, and that he will never be quite satisfied till he rides at that speed again."

"I suppose that is a perfectly veracious account," observed Kaltenborn, smiling.

"Well, that's the *home* version," admitted Carol, with her sprightly laugh. "Papa tells it a little differently outside, I believe. But that is practically the story; so that it is n't likely that Port will be able to shake papa's nerves very much to-day."

"How about the nerves of some of the rest of us?" asked Kaltenborn, quizzically; and from the little spasmodic move which Carol made, and the daring gleam which came into her eyes, he suspected that some nerves would be shaken, though certainly not hers.

Old Port watched the president's party as far as the car, and then turning to his fireman, said slowly: "I have known that girl since she was fifteen years old, and dang me, if I know her as well to-day as I did then. She's as curus a combination as I ever see. You heard her ask me to scare her paw, did n't you? You kind of thought she was jokin', did n't you? Well, you would n't if you had seen her eye. Dang me, I

believe she'd take chances on a smash-up, and killin' herself and all her family, just to scare her paw." He chuckled a little. The crowd had followed the president's party, and Port was allowing himself some relaxation. "We won't take any chances, Billy, but mebbe we can scare the old man a bit yet. I was afraid he'd see that barrel of rosin in the tender there. We won't use it unless the old man gets *too* particular; but if we salt the fire-box with that, I'll guarantee he won't kick any more."

The party filed into the private car. Judge assured the president that the stores had all been received; the train-despatcher nodded "All right" from an upstairs window; Bert, acting in his father's stead as conductor, waved his hand to Port; and the "Winifred" was under way—so smoothly and noiselessly that the occupants of the luxurious seats inside would scarcely have been aware of the start had it not been for the cheering outside.

The "Winifred" was truly a palace-car. As Kaltenborn noted the costly hangings, the polished mahogany, the rich upholstery, the heavy bevelled mirrors, the glittering chandeliers, he did not wonder that some of the directors looked askance at all this luxury. These things impressed him, though not as they had impressed the curious throng at the station. To him it was marvellous that all this comfort and luxury, all this roominess and substantiality, should be on *wheels*, flying smoothly and almost noiselessly across the country at a terrifying rate of speed. And he could not but wish, in a boyish way, that the shade of the builder of the first humble car might be there to see it all.

Mr. Darlington was telling at the moment about that

first humble car. It was merely a stage-coach, drawn first by horses, on wooden rails protected by strips of iron. Then came the first locomotive, little, if any, faster than the horses. Indeed, it was a question for some time whether horses or locomotives were the better motive power for a railroad train! The president of one of those early roads wrote, in his perplexity, to a noted civil engineer and inventor, and gravely asked him which of the two, in his opinion, was the better adapted to the work; and the inventor, old Horatio Allen, gravely answered that he preferred locomotives, because the breed of horses could never be materially improved, while no man knew what development would take place in the breed of locomotives!

Then the builder of one of those primitive engines challenged — rashly, his friends thought — a horse-car to a race, on parallel tracks. So desperate were the chances for the engine that the builder himself took his stand on the little uncovered platform, and handled the throttle and did the firing. He won by a narrow margin. The victory was proclaimed over all the civilized world, and thus was settled for all time the case of Horse *versus* Steam. Stock-raisers ominously shook their heads, and predicted the bankruptcy of every horse-breeder in the land, and looked forward to the early extinction of the equine race.

"Why, gentlemen," continued the president, enthusiastically, — including the ladies also in this address, — "less than sixty years ago the Baltimore and Ohio railroad offered four thousand dollars as a premium to the builder of an engine that could draw *fifteen* tons, day after day, at the rate of *fifteen* miles an hour, on a *level* road. Three engines were entered in the contest, but only one of them

met these rigorous requirements, and that one had to be rebuilt to do it. Think of it, gentlemen! And I'll wager that those builders were looked on by their neighbors as a lot of hare-brained inventors who might better have been making an honest living for their families by sawing wood, — just as the people to-day look on the inventors of flying-machines."

"About what weight engine did they make in them days, Darlington?" asked Mr. Bowers, making his little eyes still smaller as he asked the question, as if suggesting a mental calculation.

"These I speak of were not to weigh more than three and a half tons. They were afraid of getting them too heavy," said Darlington, sarcastically.

"What does this new one weigh?" asked Kaltenborn.

"Fifty-five tons," and the president launched out again on the comparative superiority of the latter-day engines in the matter of pulling capacity.

"What speed do you figger on makin', comin' back, Darlington?" asked Mr. Bowers again, after staring fixedly at the president for three minutes.

"Well, we *could* make eighty or ninety," answered the president, with a sparkle in his eyes. "Of course, the latter would n't be safe on this road-bed and these rails. I should n't be surprised if old Port would let her rock along at about seventy, or seventy-five, or possibly eighty, on the good stretches."

"Would eighty be perfectly safe?" asked Bowers, shifting his position a little.

The president gave Kaltenborn a peculiar glance which might have been taken in lieu of a wink. "No speed is perfectly safe," he answered, dryly.

"I mean reasonably safe, of course, reasonably safe,"

the director hastened to add, giving the ladies a sharp glance, to correct any erroneous opinion they might have formed of his railroad knowledge.

"It's safe as long as you are on the rails," returned Darlington, facetiously. "Off the rails, ten miles an hour is dangerous."

"Of course, we've got others to think of besides ourselves, — the ladies, for instance," answered Mr. Bowers, with an attempt at gallantry which was something of a failure. "Mrs. Bowers was quite uneasy this mornin' for fear something would happen to-day, and I don't think a hundred-dollar note would have tolled her into this car. But I told her," he added, complacently, "that new engines cost too much to send them head over heels into a ditch just for amusement."

"I guess we'll keep her out of the ditch, unless Headley gets too ambitious to make a record," answered the president, again giving Kaltenborn that subtle glance. The latter, as he compared Bowers's porcine face and fishy eyes with the sharp, clean-cut features of the president, could readily understand the antagonism between the two, and he could not but enjoy the president's baiting of the pompous, but timid, director. "Headley is generally conservative," continued Darlington, with keen pleasure. "But he's on his mettle to-day, and there is no fool like an old fool, you know."

"Of course, he's got his instructions," suggested Bowers, uneasily.

"I remember once," Darlington went on, disregarding the interruption, "we were testing an engine down South, with the safest and oldest engineer on the road. It took him just twenty-five minutes to make old iron out of a seven-thousand-dollar machine, and we

sold the chair-car we were in for the tacks in the upholstering."

Carol gave her father a roguish, but admonishing, glance, and Ruth lifted her handkerchief to her lips to hide a smile.

"Tacks!" exclaimed Bowers, leaning forward.

"That's all there was left worth saving," said the president, solemnly.

"I think there must have been a little more than that left, Charles," said Mrs. Darlington, with her kindly smile. "I have no recollection of that catastrophe," she added, though not as doubting the story.

"You don't remember the time old Nat Wilkins was killed?" asked her husband, in surprise.

"Oh, yes, I remember that," she admitted.

"That was the time," he returned. "I don't think there were two pieces of that engine left that you could n't have put in your pocket," he continued. "But the strangest thing about it was that not one of us, twenty in all, got anything worse than a broken arm, except poor old Nat and his fireman. I got my left wrist dislocated."

Bowers glanced at his own thick wrist, but said no more for a few minutes, and then only observed that he guessed he would take a smoke. He strolled off to the smoking-room. Several of the gentlemen followed, including the president, whom Carol detained by the sleeve long enough to whisper, "Stop it, papa!"

"Would n't you sooner be a railroad man than a preacher *now*?" she asked of Kaltenborn, as he sat down beside her, in her father's place.

"Possibly,—if I could be a president, and ride in such a car, and be surrounded by such a happy official

family," he added, with an amused glance at Darlington's retreating figure.

"Don't you make fun of the family," she admonished him, laughing. "It has on its best bib-and-tucker to-day. If you think they are misbehaving now, you ought to see them when some big expenditure is under discussion. I'll have to smuggle you into a directors' meeting some time. If you like comedies, you would enjoy the performance."

Kaltenborn murmured something about having no objection to that class of plays, and for a moment they watched the slowly revolving landscape through the window, — sear brown fields, leafless woods, straw-stacks, farm-houses, big red barns, and now and then a village, through which they whirled with unslackened speed.

"I suppose, too, if I were a railroad man just now, I could smoke," observed Kaltenborn in a low tone.

Taken off her guard, Carol flushed a little at this reference; but her eye did not quail, and she looked him calmly in the face. "I should think you would have had enough of smoking for a while," she answered. Her tone was disapproving, and it made Kaltenborn feel for a moment that he had been guilty of an indelicacy.

She looked more beautiful to him at that moment than he had ever seen her. Her hair, especially, — and he had noticed the fact several times before, that morning, — seemed thicker and finer and of a lighter shade than usual, and rolled back from her forehead and temples in heavy waves, to a massy bunch behind. Carol noticed his occasional glances, and after a little exclaimed playfully, as though making amends for her previous severity:

"You must n't look at my hair. I washed it yester-

day, and it simply won't stay up. It straggles so, and makes me look positively rebellious."

"I rather like to see you look rebellious," answered Kaltenborn.

"You would n't dare preach that," she retorted.

"I say a good many things to you that I should n't dare preach."

"What — for instance?" she asked, in a confidential undertone.

"Oh, little things that come and go like breath, but which, like breath also, may carry life or may carry disease and death," he answered, evasively. After a moment, he added, "I have no business to tell you that I like to see you rebellious."

"Why?" she asked, innocently.

"Because I despise rebelliousness in others, and because, as a rule, it is a despicable thing. It's the same selfish thing in a Lucifer falling from heaven or in a woman setting her husband at naught on the price of a new hat, knowing that she can kiss his anger away." He spoke in a low, unmoved tone, so that Cash Winter, ten feet away, might have supposed them to be discussing Browning or something else as impersonal.

"What do you say these things for, then?" she asked, almost contemptuously.

"Because you make me," he answered boldly.

The calmness with which she received this statement surprised him. She lifted her face, and looking him squarely in the eye, asked, coolly, "Why do you let me make you? You are not in the habit of letting people make you do things against your will."

There was a challenge in her tones that he certainly

would have accepted had he been allowed to answer, but at that moment Miss Dane came up, with Bert and Elsie.

"I have just dug these people out!" exclaimed Miss Dane, breezily. "Now you keep them dug out. It's a reflection on the rest of us for them to go mooning off by themselves, and they ought to be rebuked. But I suppose they are not really responsible."

Kaltenborn looked at the straight, well-knit young fellow, a head taller than the slender form by his side, easy of manner and deliberate almost to indolence, with a face singularly pure and innocent for a man's, and bearing no hint of those volcanic fires through which he had so often passed. And as he looked he did not wonder that the tendrils of Elsie's heart, in reaching upward toward sun and sky—now that the flowering hour of womanhood had arrived—should wrap themselves so tightly around this seemingly firm support. He prayed, too, in his heart, that the support might prove as firm in fact as in seeming; that it might not fall away, and leave the tendrils to grasp at empty air, until they withered, sickened, and died; or, sadder still, until they sank to earth, and locked in their blind embrace some baseborn weed, in whose dense atmosphere the blossoms of the tender plant would slowly smother and come to naught.

Miss Dane joined the group, but the two lovers, after taking their chaffing good-naturedly, managed, unobtrusively and apparently without design, to find a seat together and a little apart from the others.

"They'll think we are unsociable," said Elsie, looking into Bert's eyes.

Bert looked musingly out of the window without re-

plying. He heard, but he liked to ignore Elsie's little fears and whimsies in this way, and he fancied that she liked it too. It distinguished his manhood from her womanhood. After a moment he answered, gravely and with a touch of boyish superiority, "I am in no mood for light talk, to-day, dear. I am too happy. I am so happy that I am almost afraid."

"Afraid of what, sweetheart?" she asked, in a voice ineffably sweet and tender.

"Afraid that it is all too good to be true — that it is more happiness than I deserve," he answered solemnly.

Elsie nestled closer to him, with an impulsive little movement. "You must not, love," she whispered. "Nothing God can give is too good for you."

After a moment's silence he asked, in a lighter vein, but still soberly enough, "Elsie, has the thought crossed your mind this morning that some day you will ride over this road, possibly in this very car, as the wife of the president of the H. P., R., A., and S. railroad — as *my* wife?"

Her hand stole into his, which was conveniently near, and held it tightly — so tightly that he could feel the throbbing of his pulse within her grip.

"We are sitting in the little drawing-room," he went on musingly, "you in some loose-flowing gown, I in my smoking-jacket and slippers. We are travelling away off somewhere, taking a trip out West. It is night. A storm is raging outside, and as we fly through the darkness, the wind dashes the rain against the glass. Outside it is cold and wild and terrible; inside, it is warm and cozy. You are awed by the storm, and you creep closer and closer to me, until at last your head is on my breast, and my arm is around your waist.

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And as I bend my head and look into your half-frightened eyes, I smile, and hold you a little tighter, and you look up with a little sober smile, and whisper, 'Kiss me, husband!' And I kiss you. You love me, but you are also proud of me, for I am a great railroad president, and we are travelling over this Western road as guests of honor."

"And are you proud of me, too?" she asked, with luminous eyes.

The tender young fellow's own eyes suddenly grew misty. "Yes, I am proud, too," he answered.

For a while they sat listening to the measured click of the wheels beneath; then Bert asked, "Did it ever strike you, Elsie, that Carol could come to care for a man like Kaltenborn?"

"He's the last man in the world I should select for her," she answered. "Which may be a very good reason for thinking that she could," she added, smiling.

"I hope not," said Bert, soberly.

There was something in his manner or intonation that Elsie could not assent to, so she said nothing, but finally asked, "Why?"

"Because they are too different. Their ideas of life are utterly opposed."

Again a dissenting expression came over her face, and she asked, though without self-assertion: "Of course, we are only idly speculating; but if two such people as Carol and Mr. Kaltenborn should love each other, do you think they would give much thought to such differences?"

"They are just the people that would," he answered. "I know Kaltenborn has an influence over her," he

continued. "He has got her interested in the poor, for one thing. Yesterday she took some old clothes and some potted plants to a family that lives down by the round-house."

"So far, so good," said Elsie.

Much as she respected Carol's force and mind, the essentially feminine Elsie had not an unqualified admiration for Carol; and when she mentally compared Bert with his sister, it was always to the disadvantage of the latter.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NEW ENGINE'S METTLE

MEANWHILE, the other members of the party were amusing themselves in various ways. A card-game was going on in the smoking-room, and another one outside, though most of the men preferred simply to smoke and talk. The ladies strolled about, looking into the president's sleeping apartment, with its white bear-skin rug, or standing at the door of the tiny kitchen and watching the busy movements of Judge and his two assistants. At every turn spotless mirrors tempted the ladies to pause and peep a moment, and give their back hair a passing pressure of the hand or their ribbons a tuck.

"Have you taught him to look with equanimity upon such sights?" asked Winter of Carol, nodding his head to where Kaltenborn was standing with his hands behind his back and watching a card-game, with an intelligence which suggested that he himself had sat at table with kings and queens and the rest of the suit.

"He *is* calm," observed Carol, smiling. "But he is only adapting himself to circumstances," she added, defensively. "That's a virtue which you ought to be able to admire."

"I do admire it," he returned.

"Though I doubt very much if he does," she added, slyly.

Without regarding Kaltenborn in any sense as a rival of his in the friendship of Carol Darlington, Winter was beginning to look with no pleasure upon Kaltenborn's influence over Carol. She had of late, he noticed, a way of taking new and startling views of old and commonplace things; she was always giving the conversation a dialectical turn, and race-horse talk no longer satisfied her as once it had. Winter regarded these changes as only a passing conceit with Carol, but he relished them none the more for that.

"I ought to have been a preacher," he continued, with a jesting look. "The ministry is a sure road to popularity with women."

"I don't quite make the connection," answered Carol, dryly.

"Well, a preacher has a great organization back of him to enforce his precepts. He is a kind of monarch, and women like power. Now if I put forth a suggestion," he continued, mockingly, "it is critically examined, and, ten to one, rejected. But let a preacher put forth the same suggestion, and it is instantly accepted. Look, for instance, at the women who shut themselves up in convents at the bidding of a priest."

"There are monks," she suggested.

"Yes, but not at the bidding of women. Take Kaltenborn's church. I don't know, but I'll warrant that five-sixths of his active members are women, and that the membership of the remaining sixth of men can be credited to the influence of their wives."

"You are not finding fault with them for that?" she asked.

"Certainly not," he returned. "They are doing a good work, I suppose. All I'm trying to establish is

their submission to the dictates of a man who happens to be a preacher. They wouldn't give any woman, however talented, half the obedience they give him. They may murmur a little against the law he lays down, but they obey it. Living on a higher moral plane than his—most of them—yet they look up to him. They overlook his personal blemishes, and though they may doubt his spirituality, they accept him as authority on things spiritual."

Carol looked at him half-humorously, half-admiringly. "You surprise me, Cash. You show a perception and a philosophy that I little suspected in you."

"Of course, that is not true of all women," he qualified, not sure whether she was chaffing him or not. "Some women have an independence of religious thought equal to any man's."

"Do you admire that class of women especially?" she asked.

"I do."

"Well, just remember this," she said; "those women who are so easily led in religious matters, are simply following the bent of their natures, which is toward good. You don't think a preacher could lead them the other way, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Would you say that I am easily led?" she asked. She smiled, but looked at him keenly.

"I hope not," he answered.

"Why?"

"Because I think you have enough sense to steer your own course."

"Well, I hope so, too," she answered. "At least, that is what I am doing."

The trip up was devoid of any special incidents. Whenever they stopped, they were received by a gathering of people — for their coming had been flashed along the wires — and were cheered on their way. Once they stopped between stations on account of a hot box on the private car, and once on account of some slight derangement of the engine.

Dinner was served a little before twelve o'clock. The dining-room being inadequate for the occasion, the tables were thrown into one long board and set in the drawing-room. Though Judge's resources must have been tried, his reputation did not suffer in the least. The meal was ready on the minute set by the president, and the serving took place without a hitch. There were no tedious waits, no cold dishes, no underdone ones. The power behind the waiters — Judge himself — never once showed itself; but its sufficiency was attested by the alacrity of the crew of white-aproned blacks.

Before the meal was quite finished, the car came to a rest in the station at High Point, the terminus of the line. When the guests had risen, the president led them out into the station, where a surprise awaited them in the shape of half a dozen carriages or more, in which they were driven about the little city for a breath of fresh air.

"Now, Bert," said Mr. Darlington, when they once more stood in the station, "here's your return schedule. Keep your eye open. Get your orders at every stop, whether you need them or not. The first run is only fifteen miles, to Langdale. Thirty-seven will side-track at Ralston, and Twenty-three at Rankelman. Port will have to turn her loose to make those con-

nections. Outside of that, he can do as he pleases, and I guess that will please the rest of us," he added significantly, for old Port's fighting-blood was famous. "I've got him pretty well stirred up. Don't egg him on too much," he cautioned. "Now run into the despatcher's office, and see if everything is O. K. before we pull out. All aboard, ladies and gentlemen!"

Bert was gone several minutes, and his father, in his impatience, was just hurrying towards the despatcher's office himself when he met his son coming back. "What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Nothing," answered Bert, signalling to Port to go ahead; and the pair had to run to make the rear platform, for old Port pulled out with a vigor which indicated that he had been very thoroughly "stirred up."

The run to Langdale was made at a good warming-up pace, averaging fifty miles an hour, so the president announced. He sat with his watch in his hand, calling off the time every half-minute or so, though without once glancing out of the window at the mile-posts. This feat exciting the curiosity of the ladies, he called their attention to the rhythmic clicking of the wheels over the fish-plates, and explained that the number of these clicks in twenty seconds represented the number of miles being run to the hour. Some of the guests at this took out their watches and calculated for themselves until they grew tired of the amusement.

Between Langdale and Anniston, Bert did not appear in the private car, and in answer to Mrs. Darlington's inquiry, her husband said that Bert was in the coach, probably conferring with the two or three machinists on hand there in case of emergency. At Anniston, Bert, after looking in at the operator's window for

any telegraphic orders, made his way forward to the engine.

"Port," he called up, "father says that last run would have been a good record for a fast-freight line. This is a passenger train."

Old Port's eyes flashed at this unexpected thrust, for he had been gradually working up the speed; but he answered, respectfully, "All right," and turned from the window.

The next seventeen miles were reeled off in a little less than as many minutes. This high speed was hardly perceptible in the heavy, carefully balanced private car, the only indication being a gentle swaying motion and the low hum of the wheels. But when the passengers looked out of the windows, the trees and fence-posts and bushes showed a tendency to run together, and the banks of the cuts through which they passed flashed by in quivering lines. The president's eyes began to snap, and the guests smiled venturesomely at one another. Mr. Bowers sat with his little eyes half-closed, a picture of indifference, and in the very teeth of the president's announcement of sixty-three miles an hour, carelessly remarked to another director that he believed bituminous coal would soon take a drop.

Bert sat in the smoking-room, occupied now only by three elderly men besides himself. He took no part in their conversation, but seemed absorbed in some telegrams which he held in his hand. He had read them through several times when one of the party remarked, "She's humming now, gentlemen!" Bert looked up quickly, and gave a contemptuous laugh; and when the speaker turned questioningly, he stalked out of the room. He took his stand at the rear door of the car,

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alone, where he remained until the next stop. He then went forward to the engine again.

"Port, father says he has a bottle of nervine back there if you need it," he called up. "One of the directors also says he'd walk back to Ashboro, only he does n't want to get in ahead of the party."

The old veteran looked down testily, not just relishing the joke. But at sight of Bert's cold, satirical face, his testiness gave way to a sterner mood, and with his mechanical "All right!" he sharply ordered the fireman to fill the fire-box to the doors. The run before them was nearly twenty-five miles, over the worst section of track on the road — badly ballasted, and abounding in curves and wooden trestles. But Port was too old an engineer to begin a record-breaking run by counting chances; and grimly shutting his eyes to these unpleasant facts, he urged his ponderous iron horse to a still fiercer burst of speed. No soft cushions or cunning springs were under *him*, to lull him into a false sense of security, or to deceive him as to the awful momentum with which he was being hurled through space. The fifty tons of iron and steel which he controlled with his single hand thumped and jarred, pitched and swayed, and angrily pounded the rails beneath, or furiously ground against their sides at every curve.

The fireman was distinctly pale, but old Headley was calmly watching the frail, glistening rails, which danced in the sunlight far ahead like cobwebs wet with dew. He felt only as he had felt a thousand times before, when plunging along through pitchy darkness, — that he was in higher hands than man's. All restraint had been thrown to the winds. Caution was now but a mockery. A fallen tree, a cow, an open switch, a defective

part—the old man simply closed his eyes as he knew he would some day do when death thus faced him in fact. But, for the first time in his life, his heart was rebellious against Charles Darlington.

As the train swept down a long straight stretch of track, like a colossal projectile from a colossal gun, it seemed as if no human power could turn its flight at the bottom, and keep it from leaping the rails and burying itself in the hills beyond. But human ingenuity did it; they safely rounded the curve, and the old man gravely commanded, "Fire up!"

Now indeed it seemed as if the locomotive was a thing of flesh and blood, goaded to madness by the seething fires within its vitals. It trembled in every inch of metal, it throbbed and gasped and strained and shook; and what looked a smoothly-moving thing of beauty was in fact a hell of heat and din. But onward, ever onward it flew!

Probably not a person in the second car behind, with the exception of Charles Darlington, could have sat in that cab with unblanched cheeks. The passengers were sufficiently disturbed as it was. Conversation had ceased. A spell hung over the party. Carol sat with fearless, daring eyes, but her face was sober. Elsie, wishing Bert was with her, hugged close to Carol, her dark, dilated eyes flitting inquiringly from one face to another. Mrs. Darlington kept her eyes on her husband as he called off in a low tone, "Seventy! Sixty-seven! Seventy-one! Seventy-two! Seventy! *Seventy-five!*" indicating the variations in speed. Bowers regularly mopped the sweat from his heavy face, though the temperature was far from oppressive.

As the train slowed down for Rankelman, the president

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sharply snapped his watch shut, and said to his wife, with an ominous frown, "Headley has lost his senses. There is n't a brakeman on the road who would have picked out that stretch of line for a spurt." But his brows quickly relaxed, and with his unfailing twinkle he began to rally the others on their sober faces.

Bert once more went forward to the engine. "Stop at Hamilton, Headley!" he commanded, abruptly. "You have ten miles of the best track on the road before you. We expect you to do something better than you have yet done. An engineer, to be useful, must be fearless. If you are afraid, father says he will take the throttle himself."

Old Headley, scarcely believing his own ears, peered down into young Darlington's face with a searching, suspicious glance. "Did your father send that message to *me*?" he asked, in a voice trembling with indignation. "Does he think it's on account of myself that I have —" He broke off shortly, and passed his hand over his face in a dazed way, as though he suspected that it might be he himself and not everybody else who was going crazy. "I'll do it," he answered, dutifully, to Bert's continued haughty glance.

And he did. The run to Hamilton was made at an average speed of seventy-eight miles an hour, touching eighty at a few points. Still the passengers suffered less discomfort and were in less danger, by reason of the improvement in the road-bed, than on the last stretch at seventy miles an hour. But the wary president was conscious of the increased speed, and as the train pulled into Hamilton he thrust his head into the smoking-room, where Bert, for reasons of his own, preferred to sit, and said, "Bert, tell Port not to try to beat that!"

Bert, who was gazing steadily out of the window, nodded his head without looking up. A moment later the president saw him go forward toward the engine. Bert paused at the rear end of the tender, in a curious, hesitating way, as though lost in thought. Looking up and seeing a little boy watching him, he shook his head threateningly at him, and then laughed as the little fellow scurried off in alarm. Approaching the cab, he said :

“ Headley, father wants to see you and the fireman in the telegraph office.”

“ Both of us ? ” asked the old man, in surprise.

“ Both of you,” answered Bert, sharply. He turned on his heel, but instead of going back along the platform, mounted the front end of the coach, just behind the tender.

Forty-five seconds later, perhaps, the train moved off once more, this time with a jerk that would have been inexcusable in a freight engineer at the throttle of his first passenger-train. The president, in his seat in the private car, scowled, and murmured to Carol, “ Old Port is mad now. I’ll teach him that a train of cars is not a thing to vent his spite on.” His displeasure increased as the locomotive picked up her speed with an abruptness which indeed tested her. The president’s practised eye could very nearly approximate their speed without the use of his watch, and he estimated a few minutes later that they were running seventy miles an hour. This was about the safety limit on this particular section of track. Still they continued to move faster and faster, and at last the president drew out his watch, and noted the next mile-post, for the “ clicks ” were coming too rapidly now to be counted. Indeed, they were merged into a low, musical whirl. The next post was passed in

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just fifty seconds, — seventy-two miles an hour. The next in forty-seven seconds, the next in forty-five.

"Eighty miles an hour!" murmured Darlington, so that only Carol could hear. Still the white-banded mile-posts fantastically jumped into sight and out of sight again, like dancing, jeering imps, quicker and quicker.

The fences by this time were flying by in dizzy, trembling lines. The telegraph wires grotesquely rose and fell, mere black lines dancing against the sky. The nearer patches of wood were dark blurs. Even the cleverly constructed palace-car could not conceal such speed as this; it had ceased to glide, and was now moving in little regular bounds, with side-jerks which made the guests' heads roll on their shoulders like sun-flowers in a breeze. The windows, in spite of their rubber padding, were beginning to rattle. The colored waiter with a tray of lemonade glasses found it difficult to keep their contents off the ladies' laps. Mr. Bowers, now noticeably pale, gripped the arms of his chair, but seemed determined to die rather than cry for quarter. Elsie Clifford gazed steadily out of the window, white to the lips, but heroically silent. Even Carol looked serious, and regarded her father's silence with a puzzled expression. Still he would give no sign that anything was wrong, and doggedly scanned now his watch, now the flying and all but invisible mile-posts.

Then came a blur on the landscape, a slight darkening of the car, an increased roar, a confused rotary movement of cube-like figures outside, for the space of a breath, — and then the landscape again. It was Bloomington, through which they had swept like a devastating hurricane, without warning of whistle or bell.

"Did he whistle?" asked Darlington of Carol. He no

longer had need of talking low to hide his words from the others ; yet his voice was huskily subdued.

"No," she answered, with an alarmed glance into his excited eyes.

His next words were drowned in a loud roar which suddenly smote their ears, and as suddenly rolled away, like the report of a cannon. They had crossed the high bridge over Flat Rock River, without so much as the reduction of an ounce of steam.

"Darlington, is n't this dangerous?" cried Bowers, in desperation, lifting his voice above all the noise, and leaning forward with a pallid, drawn face.

"Dangerous!" shouted the president, leaping to his feet. "It's suicidal! The man has gone crazy!"

He reached for the bell-cord and gave it an energetic pull, commanding those who had risen to sit down again. He waited fifteen seconds. No response came from the whistle, no application of the brakes was made. Just as he seized the cord again, one of the mechanics from the coach staggered in. The president stepped forward instinctively to meet him, and then bent his ear to the other's lips. Carol saw her father suddenly turn deathly pale and lean faintly against the casing for support. Then he followed the mechanic out, like one not quite himself.

Carol jumped up, with an exclamation of alarm. For a moment she gazed excitedly at the upturned, inquiring faces, until her eye fell upon Kaltenborn, grave and anxious, but calm. She motioned to him, and the two, followed by Elsie Clifford and several others, made their way forward. As they opened the door on to the platform, a deafening roar burst upon their ears, giving them a sickening sense of the speed with which they were

rushing on to destruction. It was only a step from the vestibuled end of the private car to the door of the coach, but it was a difficult step, and both the young women reeled dangerously in spite of Kaltenborn's supporting hand. Then down the aisle of the coach they lurched and pitched, clinging as best they could to the seats, till they reached the door at the other end. There the president stood speechless and motionless, and there they, too, soon stood in the same stupefied condition.

Glaring at them over the tender from the cab of the engine, was a face whose distorted lines and fixed eyes and streaming hair both father and daughter knew well. It was Bert's. The prospect of interference seemed to have animated him with a fury that was fairly diabolical. At first sight of his father he had seized the heavy axe kept on the tender for emergencies, and this he now swung to and fro, madly and blindly, with a force that would have severed a strong man's trunk in a single stroke.

Clinging to the railing and to one another for support, the little group on the careening platform gazed at the terrible spectacle with frozen lips and cheeks. Then Darlington, with a face not unlike its usual self, except for its paleness, hastily turned back into the coach. Kaltenborn fancied he was overcome, but before he himself could arouse his benumbed faculties sufficiently to consider some method of rescue, the president as suddenly re-appeared. He carried a revolver in his right hand. With that calmness which comes to most people in the hour of extreme peril, the others watched him move to the front of the platform. Elsie stood by as quietly as though the weapon which was to strike her lover down, perhaps in death, was but a toy. Then

Carol, with a low cry of horror, threw herself upon her father's half-lifted arm. Darlington looked at her a moment, rather blankly, and then wound his left arm around her waist.

"Hold me steady, daughter!" he said.

She faltered a moment, and then the heroism which was hers as well as his, asserted itself. She braced herself against the brake-wheel, stiffened her form, and closed her eyes. This last unnerved her father, apparently, for the moment, and he lowered his uplifted arm.

"He's my boy!" he exclaimed, huskily, turning a pair of supplicating eyes upon Kaltenborn.

"Is there no other way?" asked Kaltenborn, with a dry throat.

"No other," said the president, hoarsely, "and not this unless we are quick. We meet 23 at Lamberton."

Without another word, Kaltenborn seized the weapon from Darlington's nerveless hand, quickly raised it, aimed, and fired. The swaying car destroyed his aim, and the maniac in front, with an inarticulate cry of derision, swung his axe more fiercely than ever.

"*Wait!*"

It was Elsie's voice. Before a hand could stay her, before a mind could comprehend her purpose, she had leaped upon the rail, and thence to the tender. Walking unsteadily over the rough footing afforded by the coal, and swaying to and fro with the rocking motion of the tender, she made her way toward the delirious man, closer and closer, until it seemed to the breathless spectators that the flying axe grazed her devoted bosom. If she hoped that this man who had taken the most sacred vows to love and protect her would now, by some supernatural agency, fulfil those vows, she hoped in vain.

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He was her lover now no more than if his clay had been clothed with the hair and armed with the claws of a tiger. His eyes, as she pressed nearer, glittered with a demoniac cunning and resentment. With fear, too, though one lunging stroke would have stilled forever the brave heart of the frail, unarmed woman before him. But he dared not make that stroke.

It was manifest, though, that Elsie had no chimerical hopes, but intended to match cunning with cunning. Folding her hands before her, she threw back her head and sent forth peal after peal of ringing laughter. In that environment of death and worse than death, the sweet, girlish tones, rising clear and high above all the hideous din ; that slender, swaying form, with its flying hair and drapery, — did more to awe the straining spectators than all that had gone before. It was equally effective with Bert. An expression of the intensest astonishment overspread his face, and his axe began to swing more slowly. Again the musical notes rang merrily out, and the axe came to a rest.

“Good, Bert! Good, good! Heap on the coal, heap on the coal!” she cried, and stretched her arms to him invitingly. For a moment he surveyed her suspiciously ; then, his face lighting with a childlike smile, he sprang forward and lifted her down. As he did so, she bound his arms to his side, and bore him to the floor.

Ten seconds would have been sufficient for him, in the fury of betrayal, to fling her to certain death. But scarcely five had passed before Kaltenborn had planted his bulk mercilessly upon the fallen man's breast, and pinioned his arms to the floor in a grip of iron. At the same instant almost, Charles Darlington was closing the throttle of the engine and applying the air-brakes.

Kaltenborn held his victim down until Lamberton was reached, and a doctor summoned, and the quieting morphine administered. The poor stupefied form was then carried into the private car, and laid away in the berth in the president's sleeping-room. One of the shop-hands in the coach was impressed into service as fireman, the president himself took his seat on the opposite side of the engine, and the train once more moved on, slowly and wearily by contrast with its former speed.

The remainder of the trip was painfully different from its joyous beginning. The men, after gravely canvassing the details of the harassing affair, and expressing their sympathy for the stricken family and the unfortunate son, turned to more cheerful topics, talking in the low, guarded tones which people adopt in the house of affliction. Most of the women timidly avoided that end of the car in which Bert lay, as though they feared he might rise from his stupor and stalk out among them. They looked pale and worn and shattered, and talked whisperingly of the sad event of the day. Tears now and then wet the eyes of more than one.

Mrs. Darlington and Ruth sat in the little room in which Bert lay. Ruth, seated on a stool, with her face in her mother's lap, softly sobbed. The mother, with dry eyes, soothingly smoothed her daughter's dark hair, but wisely refrained from offering further comfort. Once or twice one of the ladies appeared at the door, and asked if she could do anything. Once, too, Judge, the cook, softly glided up and solicitously asked if some "hot soup or sumpin'" would n't do Mister Bert good. "No, thank you, Judge," said Mrs. Darlington, with a grateful smile. "He's asleep now." Upon which Judge solemnly withdrew his kindly black face.

What the thoughts of that mother were, none but another mother, with another such son, could tell, — none but she who had felt the little soft lips at her breast, and the little warm hand on her neck ; who had helped along the first tottering steps, had planned the first little pair of trousers, and had seen the child fade away in the youth, and the youth in the man. None but she whose first thought, first energy, first love, first everything, had, by God's decree, been for her young.

In another private apartment, with drawn curtains, sat Elsie and Carol. They had not spoken since entering the room. The tension to which Elsie's sensitive nature was strung was painful to see. She nervously crossed and uncrossed her hands, she clutched at the folds of her dress, and the muscles of her face twitched continuously. At last she gave up.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she sobbed, despairingly, hiding her face on Carol's shoulder and piteously clinging to her hands.

"I love him, too, dear," said Carol, her own voice breaking. Elsie sobbed a little longer, and then raised her face ; their lips met and held together for a long time, the tawny head of one pressed close and lovingly against the dark head of the other, Elsie's arms around Carol's waist, Carol's around Elsie's neck.

"I dread going to bed to-night," sighed Elsie, tremulously.

"You are going to sleep with me to-night," answered Carol. Her voice was exquisitely sweet and tender, and went straight to the other's heart.

Meanwhile Kaltenborn was listening to the story of Bert's thralldom to liquor from the lips of Cash Winter. The scene he had just witnessed, and certain thoughts of

Carol which crowded in upon his brain in connection with that scene, made Kaltenborn unusually impressionable, and Winter's story affected him deeply.

"I drink myself, a little," concluded Winter, invited to this frankness by Kaltenborn's fraternal manner, "and I have a bar attached to my hotel. I could hardly run the hotel without it. But every time Bert has one of these falls, I have such a repugnance to the accursed stuff that I am tempted to close the bar and pocket my losses. Yet Bert never got a drop to drink in my place, and my bar-tenders know it would be worth their jobs to sell him one. And it is n't the liquor alone," he continued, defensively. "Liquor works no such havoc with you or me, or with more than one man in ten thousand. The curse is in Bert's blood. I suppose people look at his parents and sisters and Elsie — poor little thing! — and his prospects, and wonder how he can drink. But I know that he is not a responsible being when these moods take him. C. A.'s father was the same kind of a man, though C. A. never takes a drop himself. It's distasteful to him. His father died at thirty-five — as a result of drink, I suppose, — and left his family without a cent, for he could never get insured, and C. A. went to work in the shops when he was only a child."

"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," said Kaltenborn, sadly. "I know of a case along the same lines. The grandfather had such a temper that he more than once tore a shirt off his back because it chafed his neck. If he stubbed his toe on a chair, he would often kick it across the room, and had been known to throw it through a window. His grandchild displayed the very same temper at a tender age, and the child's mother used to smile at it

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and call it spirit. At twenty-two the boy was a murderer, and is in the penitentiary now. Should he happen to marry and have children, it will take generations of struggle and tears and bitter remorse on the part of innocent ones to exorcise that devil. I think that is one of the most solemn thoughts that ever come to my mind. The victim may be just such a manly young fellow as Bert Darlington. But saddest of all, perhaps, — at least to a man, — is when the victim is some pure, sweet girl, as free from sin almost as an angel, yet destined, through the devil that her father or grandfather or great-grandfather nursed into lusty life upon his evil passions, to be shunned by her sex, and to die a nameless thing, and be buried in a potter's field. The lesson is — Be good."

At Ashboro, Kaltenborn walked upstairs in the station with Carol while she telephoned to the house for a carriage.

"Is there anything that I can do?" he asked, as they stood at the head of the stairs.

"Be charitable," she answered, with a little worn smile

"I feel now as though I could never be anything else," he returned, sympathetically.

She half offered, he half invited, her hand; and when it lay in his he carried it to his lips. She received the homage in the spirit in which it was given, and as she turned her head partly away to gather up her skirts to descend the stairs, she said quietly, —

"I don't know why I should be so glad that you did that."

CHAPTER XXIV

A DROWNING MAN'S STRAW

WHEN Charles Darlington stepped down from the locomotive at Ashboro, he looked ten years older than he had in the morning. He looked much better after breakfast the next day, but still had not gotten back all the years of which he had been robbed. At the office he found the editor of the *Intelligencer*, who respectfully solicited an authoritative account of the sensational events of the day before, and declared his readiness to suppress whatever facts the president should indicate.

"Suppress nothing," said Darlington, sharply. "You are not running your paper in the interests of my family. Your subscribers pay for the news, and they ought to have it." And he briefly outlined the whole affair.

All day long Darlington flitted in and out of Carol's room, on one pretext or another, passing and re-passing the traffic-manager's empty private office, — for Bert lay on a bed of fever. Carol understood these visits. She knew that her father in his loneliness and heartache wanted to be near her, to hear her voice, to touch her hand, and to be constantly assured that she was not too miserable. The thought made her very tender, and more than once, as the door closed on his trim, upright figure, the tears came into her eyes, and she murmured to her-

self, with a lump in her throat, "Poor papa! poor papa!" Nothing about him, though, betrayed his grief — no wanness of face, no subdual of voice, no diminution of energy. This stoicism in her father always excited Carol's profound admiration, and she had striven to acquire it with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

To-day, though, she wanted to lay her head on her father's shoulder and have a good cry. She would not gratify the weakness, — as she believed it, — but she came very near doing so perforce. The two were going over a large sheet of tonnage statistics — properly Bert's work. Mr. Darlington, standing by Carol's chair, dropped his arm across her shoulder. All at once the dry columns of figures were splashed with a single teardrop. Both affected not to see it, and were so affecting still when another crystalline drop fell, and, mixing with the purple copying ink, wrought havoc with the clerk's neat sheet. For a moment the figures blurred before Carol's eyes; then she softly drew her handkerchief and cleared the mist away, and was about to go on calling off figures, when her father abruptly pressed his face tightly to hers, and held it there while the scalding, beneficent tears poured down her cheeks. When he released her, with some murmured tenderness, she gave him a moist, tremulous kiss.

That evening a little family council was held, consisting of father, mother, and elder sister. Darlington sat by the table with his paper in his hands, glancing it over perfunctorily in the intervals of silence. Carol sat with a book in her lap, but she had read over and over the same page without interest or comprehension. Mrs. Darlington was in her accustomed place at the end of the table, working away steadily with her needle, but

with luminous, troubled eyes. At last Darlington laid his paper down ominously.

"We might as well face the music," he said, conclusively. "There is only one thing left to do, and that is to send him to some institution for treatment."

Neither of the women moved an eyelid, but Mrs. Darlington's hands suddenly became still. Then Carol gave her father an inquiring glance.

"I was talking with Dr. Hammond about it to-day," Darlington continued, "and he strongly urged such a course. There is no doubt about it, it is a disease with Bert; and the longer it runs, the harder it will be to cure. He cannot overcome it alone, any more than he could any other disease."

"Sometimes people can overcome disease by will-power alone, especially diseases of a nervous order, like this," suggested Carol.

"Bert can't," answered her father. "He has demonstrated that. So far as the disgrace of sending him off somewhere is concerned," he continued, as if he had outlined all objections in advance, "nothing can add to the disgrace he has already brought on himself — and us. We might as well look that fact in the face. There is no use in shutting your eyes to a thing that is as patent as sunlight. Every man, woman, and child in this town knows his weakness."

Again neither of the women took any exception to his statement, but Darlington knew well enough that silence, in this case at least, did not give consent. He would have been glad, indeed, had they offered some valid objection, for the course he proposed was, in spite of his brave words, gall and wormwood to his pride. Finally he continued, —

"Dr. Still says, though, that he is not sure about the

benefits of such a course. The treatment frequently fails, he says, even in the case of habitual drunkards, and with periodical drunkards its efficacy is even more uncertain. In Bert's case he thinks the moral influence would be bad. It would not only be a public acknowledgment of the boy's inability to overcome his appetite, but he thinks the taking of medicine would tend to make Bert himself relax his will power. I don't know but he's right. But it's the single chance left," he added, with a kind of desperation, "and it seems to me that we can't do less than try it. We owe it to the boy, for he won't go himself. We have tried everything else. If Bert had associates that led him into these excesses, I'd send him away. But it is n't his friends. I know very well that his friends exercise a restraining influence, if anything. And his incentives all around to a life of sobriety are greater here than they could be anywhere else. Whiskey alone does it, and where on earth can I send him that he can't get whiskey?"

"There is one thing that I ought to tell you both," said Mrs. Darlington, in a subdued voice, "now that this idea of — of sending him off has come up. I had a long talk with him this afternoon, and I think he sees some things in a new light — some things about the church and a Christian life, Charles," she added, with an earnest glance at her husband. "He talked very earnestly, and I believe a change has taken place in him. I believe he has secured an ally which will enable him to conquer his foe — if it can be conquered without medical aid. And I think, Charles, that we ought to give him one more chance to escape the humiliation of confessing to the world his inability to help himself."

Darlington was as willing as his wife to spare his son's

pride. This hope of hers was built, to his sceptical mind, upon sinking sand. But drowning men grasp at straws, and, furthermore, the thought had crossed his own mind more than once, since Bert's last spree but one, that he might possibly be wrong about this thing called religion. It had certainly helped others. The unfailing sweetness and patience of his wife through all their married years, he had always attributed to natural traits; but of late the thought had come to him with peculiar persistency that possibly her virtues were in part owing to her Christian ideals. If Bert could be made to *believe* that Christianity would help him, Darlington could see, scientifically, how he would be helped; for a believer would receive benefit through the mere act of believing, regardless of the truth of his belief. Darlington could not entertain the highest respect for the intelligence of any person who could accept, *in toto*, the teachings of any church, even though that person was his own wife or son; and in his heart he regarded the vein of scepticism in Carol as an evidence of intellectual acuteness. But intellect was not everything, he well knew. Consequently, his wife's words threw a faint, trembling ray of hope into the gloom which now oppressed him, and after some further talk the project of sending Bert away was temporarily abandoned.

Carol went upstairs to relieve Ruth, who was watching beside Bert. She found Bert asleep. His pale face, which seemed to have grown thinner in only twenty-four hours, his white hand on the coverlid, and a general air of invalidism and frailty, gave him a peculiarly chastened appearance. A book was lying open on the little table near his pillow. She glanced at it, and saw that it was the Bible.

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This simple incident affected her most powerfully, and when she went to her own room, she had hardly closed the door before she burst into tears ; and with twitching lips and an aching tenderness she murmured, "Poor, *dear* little brother !" That Bible was inexpressibly pathetic to her. Bert had always been indifferent to the church and to spiritual matters ; since he was a little lad at his mother's knees he had probably never read consecutively a whole chapter of the Scriptures ; and Carol's mental picture of him, propped up in bed, patiently, blindly, hopefully groping through those pages of sacred writ for the mystic words which would make a man of him again, stirred her love to its deepest depths.

Was it all a delusion — this religion ? Was Kaltenborn a victim of delusion ? Were all the millions who read that Book with faith, who lived with lighter hearts because of it, who laid their loved ones hopefully away because of it, who died with smiles upon their faces because of it — were all these victims of a delusion ? Were all the millions who bent the knee in Christian lands to be classed with the savage who prostrated himself before a painted image and prayed for rain ? Carol had asked herself these questions before, but to-night there was something abhorrent even in the asking of them ; and it was a source of wonderful consolation to her to know that, whatever her secret doubts might have been, she had never spoken one word to destroy a single fellow-being's faith.

Bert was confined to his bed for several weeks by what the family knew as nervous prostration. Elsewhere it was known by another name, a terrible Latin name, associated with infernal terrors — *delirium tremens*. His case was a mild one, though, and the devils which he

saw were goblins — little fellows of a tantalizing rather than of a frightful mien. The footboard of his bed was their favorite carnival ground. Here they gathered — grotesque little fellows, with big paunches, pipe-stem legs, peaked caps, and flowing whiskers — and winked and grimaced and turned somersaults and shook their fists at Bert and laughed and pretended to jump on him, swinging their arms back and forth to get a good start, as the boys used to do at school. It was seldom that they frightened Bert, but they often made him angry, in his irritable condition. To enable him, therefore, to rid himself of these pests, a cane was left at his bedside. As long as the goblins amused him, he would let them alone ; but when they began threatening, he would stealthily reach for his cane, gradually lower it until it rested on the far end of the footboard, and then, with one quick move, he would sweep the whole band off into vanishing air.

Sometimes, when Carol or Ruth was sitting on the edge of the bed, one of these mischievous goblins would unexpectedly put in an appearance on her shoulder, or, still more impudently, on top of her head, from which point he would thrust out his tongue at Bert, or jump up and knock his heels together, or slap his sides and crow like a rooster, — all in a most tantalizing manner. Bert would silently watch his tormentor until his patience was exhausted ; and then, cunningly diverting his eyes so that the imp might not suspect his purpose, he would whisper his trouble to his sister. Upon this, she would lift her hand with infinite caution until it hovered above the unsuspecting victim, then pounce down upon him like a hawk, squeeze him between her fingers until he shrieked with pain, and toss him into space. This

performance seldom failed to make the invalid laugh until his shrunken, childish piping filled the room, and the tears ran down his cheeks. To Carol, too, this routing of the goblins was so funny that the tears often crowded her eyes, until Bert would sometimes say, pettishly, "Don't laugh that way, Carol! You look as though you were crying."

Bert's real suffering was not in this fantastic land of goblins, but in the material land of humiliated parents and sisters, stricken sweetheart, blasted hopes, impotent resolutions, broken vows, and dark, uncertain future. The anguish which racked his wasted frame as he thought of these, in his rational moments, can be better imagined than described. To such an extent was his self-abasement carried that he shrank at times from the eyes of his mother and sisters. Yet he was brave, and he suffered in secret except on the few occasions when the demon of Remorse prodded him so pitilessly that he broke down utterly in the presence of Carol or his mother.

Elsie came nearly every day to inquire after the sick one, and to leave him flowers or delicacies. She did not ask to see him, though, and he did not ask to have her brought up, or make any confidences to any of the family about her. Kaltenborn also called several times; but though he and Bert were designedly left alone, the latter said nothing to his mother about having opened his heart to the minister.

Bert first left the house on a beautiful spring morning. It was late in April, but the season was backward, and the tender green leaves on the elms were scarcely larger than squirrels' ears. Yet the sun shone with the fervor of a penitent; the dead, brown lawns were sprinkled with green; the crisp air was touched with a summery

softness ; and all nature seemed to be beginning anew.

Bert wore a heavy overcoat, and was muffled to the ears. Haggard, hollow-eyed, trembling, leaning heavily upon a cane, with an old man's stoop and a settled air of sadness and despair, he made his way slowly along the sunny street. His eyes were fastened on the ground, and he seemed oblivious to everything around him. Some one met and passed him on the sidewalk ; he knew it was a man, and he knew, from a slight change in the footfalls, that the man was looking back at him ; but that was all. He passed another pedestrian, and again he knew he was being stared at from behind. A carriage rolled by — he knew it was a carriage from its rumbling. It seemed to slacken its speed as it drew nearer, and then the sweet voice of a young woman sang out, blithely, "Why, hello, Bert !" He nodded his head without lifting his eyes, and made an abortive motion toward his hat with his hand, and continued on his tottering way.

He passed Elsie Clifford's home. He knew it without looking, but no one would have suspected it from any change in his expression. He turned the next corner beyond, mechanically, and apparently without marking his course. Two large dogs were romping on the sidewalk. They took no pains to get out of his way, and he weakly struck at them with his cane. One of them, with puppy awkwardness, dashed against Bert's legs in its efforts to escape, and he reeled and fell to the sidewalk. His hat rolled away into the grass on the terrace. For a moment he stared about him in a bewildered way, and made no attempt to rise. Then some one, running up from behind, bent over him and asked him if he was hurt. Bert murmured something unintelligible, and his

rescuer, after looking at him queerly for a moment, lifted him to his feet and set his hat on his head. Without glancing at his good Samaritan, Bert mumbled his thanks, and moved slowly and uncertainly on. He turned in at a little vine-clad, stuccoed cottage, and asked of the old woman who responded to his ring — Mrs. Hicks — for the Rev. Stephen Kaltenborn. A moment later he was seated in the minister's study.

The young man's aspect gave Kaltenborn a positive shock. He had seen Bert during his sickness a number of times, but there the environment of bed and sick-room prepared one for the change, and smoothed over the fell work of disease. Walking about, in the garb of every-day life, Bert looked like one risen from the grave. He seemed the wreck of his former self. Nor was the change merely physical. The stooped, trembling figure and the wasted face were bad enough, but there was something almost appalling in the stolid hopelessness which was stamped upon him, and which seemed to weigh him down like an incubus from which there was no escape. His blue eyes were faded and dull ; his brow was wrinkled and contracted, like a dotard's.

"Mr. Kaltenborn," he began, abruptly, "I come to ask if there is any earthly salvation for such as I." He spoke in a high, shrill key, with a querulous quality in his voice. "I come to ask if Jesus Christ can do anything for such as I."

"Jesus Christ came for just such men as you," answered Kaltenborn, gravely.

Bert stared at him with dull, unresponsive eyes ; yet there was a terrible earnestness and penetration in his gaze, such, Kaltenborn fancied, as one might have before the Judgment-seat.

"If Christ can't save me, I am lost — lost forever," said the invalid, after a pause. "I have exhausted all other means. My manhood, my resolutions, my sacred vows, my mother, my sisters, my affianced love, my prospects, the opinion of men, — all have failed. For whiskey, the sight and smell of which I loathe, I have made a devil of myself, — a foul-mouthed, beastly, murderous thing. I have torn the hearts of those I hold dearest, trampled their pride in the dust, and made them curse the day that I was born." He paused, and looked Kaltenborn steadily in the eye, as if to make sure that he realized the infamy of this indictment. "That is the kind of a man I am — if it be not calumny to you and others of your race for me to call myself a man."

"Don't abase yourself too much," said Kaltenborn, hopefully. "There are extenuating circumstances which I and all your friends fully recognize."

A bitter, sarcastic smile, not just that of a sane man, spread over Bert's face. "Abase myself too much ! Abase myself too much !" he murmured to himself, musingly, as though it were a joke. Then his expression suddenly changed, and he answered with unaccountable haughtiness : "Sir, it is impossible for me to abase myself too much. You cannot comprehend the depths of my depravity. I do these things knowingly, sir, without pity or remorse. When I am drunk, sir, I could kill — I could kill —" He shuddered, and was unable to go on. "I will not harass your feelings," he began again, gently this time, "but I must say that I knowingly and voluntarily —"

"No, not knowingly and voluntarily," protested Kaltenborn, emphatically, anticipating the other's self-denunciation.

"Knowingly and voluntarily," repeated Bert, just as emphatically. "When I take a drink, I take it knowingly and voluntarily. There is no force back of it. I toss it off as freely, as carelessly, as I would a cup of tea. I know what I am doing just as well as you would. There is no force, I say, no burning thirst, no irresistible craving. I do it because I want a drink, just as you might want one. I could get along without it; I know I ought to get along without it. Yet I take it. I have no strength to resist. I don't mean to get drunk. I never meant to get drunk in my life. Yet who but a hopeless fool," he cried, passionately, "who but a moral degenerate, could go on deceiving himself for years?"

Kaltenborn looked at him sadly. Far from accepting Bert's word that there was no force, he saw in this complete subversion of will and reason a most terrible force, one that worked with the cunning and subtlety of a devil. He saw, moreover, — and the thought made him cold around his heart, — a chain of cause and effect operating in young Darlington's brain, *without the consent of the man*. He saw a process of cellular movement within Bert's brain, which, given its excitant — the sight or smell of whiskey, or the sign-board of a saloon, or even something whose connection with whiskey no man could trace — mechanically sent him to the bar, like an automaton, ordered his whiskey for him, lifted it to his lips, and poured it down his throat, — a cellular movement as independent of Bert's will as the beating of his heart or the filling of his lungs; a cellular action and interaction established and perfected by his grandfather. Likewise, when a newly born baby feels the nipple between its lips, it begins to suckle. The excitants were different; the action was first nature in the baby's case,

second nature in Bert's; but the process was the same. Both were the result, so Kaltenborn believed, of the working of *matter*, as simple and as positive in action, and as scientifically explainable, as the movements of a machine.

"Sometimes I want it, but say No," continued Bert, "and keep away from it as easily as you could. I feel weak and tired now, for instance, from walking up here. I know that a drink of whiskey would do me good. A doctor might prescribe it for anybody else. But no power on earth could tempt me to touch it. I could look at it, smell of it, — I could wash my mouth out with it, and not swallow a drop. But that means — nothing — nothing — nothing. My appetite is asleep — glutted. It is not *it* that thinks whiskey would do me good now. It is *I*, my sane self. I can refuse myself. But let *it* ask for whiskey, and — you know the result. When *it* asks for whiskey, I know it in a minute. I am on my guard. To be safe, I say I won't go down town. But I go. I can't tell you why. Once down town, I say I won't go into a saloon. But I go. I can't tell you why. I say I won't take a drink, but I take it. I walk up to the bar saying that I won't take it. I order the drink saying I won't take it. I say it while I hold the glass in my hand. I say it, Mr. Kaltenborn," he exclaimed, piercingly, "while the accursed stuff is running down my throat. I *say* it, but I know I am a liar."

"When you go down town, do you know that you are going to take a drink?" asked Kaltenborn, thoughtfully.

"It may seem incredible to you, but I don't. I indulge in the first step, flattering myself that I am strong

enough to refrain from the second one. Sometimes I go down town just to prove that I am strong enough to go and not drink. I have never proved it. I never shall," he added, blackly. "Sometimes I find some other excuse for going — anything or nothing, it matters not."

"The place for you to win victory, Mr. Darlington, is in the very first skirmish with your temptation," said Kaltenborn, after a little reflection. "You will never win it anywhere else. Your desire to prove your strength is only a device of the tempter — a tempter so subtle that one is almost persuaded to believe in the old personal devil. You must recognize that fact, and you must shut resolutely down on yielding one iota, even in your thoughts. It is easy for me to talk, I know, and hard for you to do ; but I must talk, and you must do. Don't permit yourself to think of going down town. Keep yourself in an elevated state of mind," he added, though such advice sounded almost like mockery — it was so hard to follow. "Think what you can be to your friends and your family. Look upon yourself as an instrument of God's, with a given work to do. Think constantly of His watching you. Remember that He is with you in your struggle, that He is *in* you. He made you for a purpose, and He will not lightly let you miss that purpose. You may think yourself the victim of a law. If you are, it is a broken law. Remember that the laws of the universe are but His will ; that they are all beneficent ; that they are working in you to help you in your fight, if you get into position to be helped."

He paused, wondering if he had told the strict truth. He wondered if those very laws were not working for the destruction of this perverted youth, in order that the

perversion might not spread. He wondered if that complex system of Cause and Effect, popularly known as Habit ; if that unconscious, volitionless, cellular movement which he had been thinking of a moment before, was really hurrying this poor wretch on to destruction.

Bert wearily shook his head at Kaltenborn's conclusion. "I have done it all," he said. "That and a thousand times more. I have a book at home in which I have written out every sentiment I could think of that would lift a man above a brute, — all my love, hopes, and ambitions ; my expectation of some day being a husband and a father ; my awful responsibility if those unborn innocents receive this legacy from me ; my hopes of heaven, with the dear one of my choice and my family ; everything that could stir my soul I have written down there, and taken the most solemn vow that I would read it all over when I was tempted. I have vowed that even if I yielded, I would read it over once again, thoughtfully and solemnly, before I took a drink, in the hope that I might be saved at the last moment. It has failed. I don't read it.

"To school my will," he continued, after a moment, "I have assigned myself a thousand useless tasks, to be gone through with every day. I swing my Indian clubs a certain number of times ; I count up to a certain number ; I repeat quotations over and over ; I wash my hands and face and teeth at certain hours — many times oftener than is necessary. I do, I say, a thousand useless, even repugnant, things to school my will. I have performed these tasks faithfully for weeks and months. But infallibly the time comes when these things seem too absurd, too childish, too useless, to be continued, and I give them up. But, whether I give them up or not, I

drink just the same. No," he repeated, shaking his head once more, "I cannot do it alone. Jesus Christ must save me, or I am lost."

"Christ can save you, and will," said Kaltenborn. "But you must let him do it in His own way. I must tell you plainly, too, in common honesty, that you must look for no miracle. To throw yourself upon your knees and confess your weakness to Him, and leave it all with Him, hoping thus to arouse His compassion and to be saved without an effort of your own, will not do. I am tempted to wish that I could tell you that He would thus miraculously preserve you, for I know you have fought hard. But, after all, that would be only *my* way of having it done — only the way that men, in times past, have thought it was done, and which some still think is the way. We are now finding out that God does it differently, and need I say how much more grandly? Were man saved by the arbitrary act of God, he would sink into the insignificance of a puppet worked by wires. As it is, his possibilities of development are unbounded. You must get Christ into you. That sounds trite, I know, but it means something. Think on the noble morality and philanthropy He taught, away back in those dark days, and in time you will find yourself in the grasp of an admiration and inspiration such as you do not now dream of, and which will lift you high above the mire in which you have grovelled — in which we are all prone to grovel in different ways. You will find yourself always in that elevated mood of which I just spoke, when the very thought of sin will be abhorrent to you."

Bert stared at the floor, without a change of feature. "Your views of Christ are mine," he answered, in a dead tone. "I never believed He saved by miracle. But I

thought — I hoped I might be wrong. It is only by miracle that I can be saved."

Kaltenborn did not answer at once. Never before had the utility of his religious belief been put to such a test. His unorthodox views had bothered him little in his ministry. By glossing them over, or by keeping them in the background, he had kept within the pale of his church, just as many another deep-thinking minister has had to do in order not to destroy his usefulness. But to-day, with this naked soul before him, he was forced to declare himself to the last word, and as a result the seeker of salvation before him had pronounced himself lost. The moisture stood upon Kaltenborn's brow, but he manfully put aside the temptation to offer lying words of comfort.

"When you talk in that way," he returned, gently but firmly, "you simply reject God's way, and declare against it in favor of man's. Because Christ does not save miraculously, you believe He does not save at all. Is not that an impious, puerile thought? Christ came and lived a perfect life to show all men what they can do. He struggled with temptation until He sweat drops of blood. Have you done as much? Yet He won, and died blameless. Does not such a story thrill you and uplift you? If not, it is only because you do not comprehend its magnificence. Sometimes I am uplifted by it until I seem to hear the rustle of angels' wings."

"Christ was born free from sin," answered Bert, doggedly. "I came with this curse in my blood."

"He was not born passionless," answered Kaltenborn, quickly. "He was born with all the passions of men."

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"Don't you believe that Christ was sinless?" asked Bert, with a feeble gleam of interest in his eyes.

"Not in the accepted sense," said Kaltenborn. "That Christ stalked through the world, a mere reflection of God, a divinity masked in human flesh, incapable of sin, held up by something that is denied you and me, and yet asks you and me to be like Him, is the cruellest, most abhorrent thing that I can conceive. For God to ask us to equal such a creation would be a mockery; and for Him to punish us for not equalling it would be a piece of injustice worthy of a pagan despot."

For a moment there was silence, and then Kaltenborn continued gravely, "That is my belief, Mr. Darlington. It has strengthened me, and it will strengthen you. Christ was great only as other men have been great, though we must remember that He was incomparably the greatest of them all. The example of any great man ought to help you, but the example of Christ most of all."

"I thought of joining the church," said Bert, gloomily. "But I don't see the use if your views are right."

"Why not? Whatever may be its errors, the church is Christ's great organ. While humanity is weak wherever you find it, yet you will meet in the church examples of Christlike sweetness and piety and exaltation that will surprise you, and do you good. They are not numerous, I will confess, but you will find some."

"If I joined at all, I wanted to join your church," said Bert.

"Why not your own — your mother's and your sisters', where your friends and associates are?"

"Why not yours?" retorted Bert.

"Join that, if you will; but I think you would feel

more at home in the Episcopal church. Our church forbids certain pleasures that you have been brought up to consider harmless. The rules might bear on you rather heavily, and I want to make it as easy for you as possible. But whatever church you join, or whether you join any or not, I have this to say as a last word. You are weak and despondent yet. Don't worry too much about yourself now. Abide your time; wait until your strength returns, and I will pledge myself, with your aid, to overcome this weakness of yours yet. When you feel your appetite stirring come to me, at any hour of the day or night. I shall not think you weak or foolish. Rather, I shall think you strong and wise. If you will do this, I am positive you cannot fall. If you don't think it necessary to come to me, — that is, if your symptoms are not alarming, — go to your sister Carol. She is a noble girl, and confession to her will do you good. It will rout that devil in you, and give you a spiritual uplifting."

"She *has* helped me," said Bert, gratefully.

"She will do it again," said Kaltenborn, hopefully.

"We will all do it, and we'll win."

For ten minutes more Kaltenborn talked on earnestly and enthusiastically, until his strong and fearless nature communicated some of its fire to his listener and a ray of hope shone faintly from his eyes. Then his face unexpectedly fell again.

"What is it?" asked Kaltenborn, intuitively.

"I wanted to go to Elsie with some new hope this time. I wanted to tell her that I was going to lean on Christ from now on. I wanted something definite. She can't have any more faith in me unless I offer her something of that kind," he exclaimed, bitterly, bursting into

tears. "There is nothing in me that she can respect any more. She would have faith in somebody else, or in Christ. This plan we have talked over may help me, but its success depends a good deal on *me*, and that, — that will destroy her faith."

"You *are* leaning on Christ, and you may tell her so."

"Not in the way she leans," he answered, dispiritedly.

"There's less difference than you think, in practice," said Kaltenborn, encouragingly. "It's in the theory that there seems such a wide divergence."

"She may have thrown me over altogether," mused Bert, gloomily. "If she has —"

"If she has, you will be a man, just the same," interposed Kaltenborn. "If she loves you, she will not lose sight of you, though she should forbid you to enter her house. And when you have conquered, you can go to her and offer her a thousand times more than you can to-day. But go to her to-day, or some time soon. There is no need of despairing yet, for if there is any being this side of heaven Christ-like in forgiveness, it is a woman who loves."

"Christ himself would have thrown me over long ago," said Bert, simply, "if I had broken my word to Him as often as I have to her."

Kaltenborn smiled. "You have n't tried Him yet," he answered.

Bert rose, and buttoned his overcoat with white, trembling fingers. There was not much in his face to give Kaltenborn hope, but the minister remembered that the young fellow was yet sick. "I don't know," said Bert, rather vaguely. "If your views are right, — and I believe they are, — I don't know whether Christ can help me or not. I think I've gone too far. I fancy the devil within

me is too strong to be exorcised. I fancy the way to kill that devil is to kill me," he said, with a tone and expression that made Kaltenborn's blood run cold, "and I fancy that's the way Christ will do it. But maybe not, maybe not," he added, as if to spare the other's feelings. "Good-by." He held out his thin, bloodless hand, with a wan smile which pathetically suggested his old bonhomie.

CHAPTER XXV

WHERE FORGIVENESS IS DIVINE

ELSIE CLIFFORD knelt at her bedside on the second night after the memorable speed trial — she had spent the first night with Carol — and in language as simple as she would have addressed to an earthly parent, she asked her Heavenly Father to tell her what to do. Her decision seemed to her so momentous for good or for evil, so unique in the experiences of mankind, that she would scarcely have been surprised had God taken special cognizance of it, and spoken to her out of the clouds as He spoke to the prophets of old. But He did not so speak, and she rose with the weight of woe still bearing down upon her brave heart.

For hours she lay and wrestled with the great problem — to give Bert up, or not to give him up. The probable effect of her dismissal upon him ; the acceleration of his ruin ; the effect her marriage would have upon herself in case he never reformed ; the chances of his reforming after she had married him ; what were her rights, and what her duties ; how much she should suffer for his sake ; how much she ought to deny her love for her own sake, — these and a thousand other perplexing questions she went over again and again.

In the stillness and darkness and solitude of night, and in her excited condition, things lost their true proportions. She seemed to escape from herself, and to

appeal to herself as another person. At one time she half fancied she had married Bert already, and looking down the vista of time, she beheld herself as the ancestress of a great family. She saw the members of this family playing, toiling, loving, marrying, failing, succeeding, dying. But behind and through all she saw the workings of that curse let into their veins by a weak forefather, through the connivance of a weak mother — she, Elsie Clifford — generations before they were born. She hearkened for their curses — for certainly she should be cursed — until in her half delirious condition she seemed really to hear a confused murmur come faintly up from the far-distant future. God had not spoken, but His all-seeing eye was upon her, and she dared not shirk. She would not shirk either, but what *was* shirking, and what was not?

About three o'clock in the morning a hysterical fear that some catastrophe was about to befall took possession of her. She first thought of screaming for her grandmother, for it seemed that she must have some human presence near her or go mad. But reason had not yet left her, and reflecting that a scream would frighten her grandmother, she slipped from bed, and with fast-beating heart and trembling knees, glided noiselessly down the hall to her grandmother's door. There the thought struck her that her grandfather would be sure to grumble if she awakened him. She smiled that she should stop to consider such a trifle as that in such a crisis, and then she thought how strange it was that she should be standing there smiling when but a moment before she had been so frightened. She felt so much better that she went back to bed again; but no sooner had she closed her eyes than the torturing fan-

cies came trooping back to her ; and it was with an overpowering sense of thankfulness that she saw her grandmother enter the door.

"Why don't you go to sleep, child?" asked Mrs. Clifford. "I thought I heard you up a moment ago."

"I'm so nervous!" exclaimed the girl, clinging to the old lady's hand.

Mrs. Clifford got into the bed, and drawing Elsie close to her bosom, said, "You won't be nervous now. Go to sleep. If there is anything that bothers you, we will decide it all to-morrow." And in less than five minutes the tired body was in repose.

Nothing further was said about her trouble in the morning, however ; and of the solution she eventually reached, Elsie said nothing to her grandmother, and her grandmother asked nothing. Indeed there was a chastened and spiritual air about the girl which forbade any inquisitiveness. Even the old man, whose affections had long since dried up and blown away, and who practically regarded love as a weakness of youth, put away his usual querulousness on the subject, and maintained silence.

It was a soft, warm evening, and Elsie was sitting on the veranda for the first time after dark that spring, when Bert Darlington stopped at the gate. As he came slowly down the walk, with cane and overcoat, the collar of the latter turned up, Elsie quickly rose and descended to the bottom step, where she stood with outstretched arms, in a playful, endearing manner.

"Welcome, truant!" she exclaimed, cheerily.

"A welcome is more than a truant deserves," he answered, with a wan smile, taking both her hands in his. For a moment they stood thus, face to face, in an

embarrassing silence. Then Bert added, "I can't sit out here. The doctor has ordered me to keep out of the night air."

"And did you suppose I was going to let you sit out here?" she asked, with tender indignation, playfully turning him toward the door. "March! and be careful that you don't bump your nose in the dark." As she lighted a lamp, she ran on, "I'm so glad you came. I was just a little lonely. It is such a lovely evening that grandfather and grandmother thought they would walk over to Mr. Everett's." She paused to stir the fire a little in the next room. "This fire is about out. We thought we'd let it go out, but grandfather is a little afraid of a cold snap yet. He says we had just such weather as this in '54, when everything was killed by a late frost," she added, laughing. "Come out here—it's warmer."

"It's warm enough here," answered Bert, getting slowly out of his coat, though Elsie flew back to help him.

It was the first time she had seen him since she bore him to the cab floor, on that fateful ride. His wasted appearance smote her heart, and she could have cried then and there but for her resolution to avoid anything tragical at this meeting. So she slipped up to him, instead, and placing her hands on his shoulders looked up into his face with a whimsical smile. "You poor boy!" she murmured. "You have been sicker than I dreamed of."

After a moment or two of this, during which Bert seemed reasonably cheerful, he suddenly exclaimed in leaden tones, "Elsie, I can't keep this deception up any longer. What have you decided to do?"

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"What have you decided to ask me to do?" she returned, in a low tone.

"To follow your conscience," he answered. "I have forfeited every right I ever had."

"Herbert, you have not given up?" she asked, not in dismay or apprehension, but with soft, sweet reproach.

"Just about," he answered, despondently.

"And you are not going to try any more?" she continued, with the same gentle, hurt look.

"I have tried a long time," he returned.

"And I have forgiven you a long time, dear," she rejoined.

"Yes. If there had been a spark of manhood left in me, that would have saved me. But it did not."

"Bert!" she exclaimed, abruptly, shutting her lips firmly, "do you suppose that I would have struggled with my heart all these months and years as I have for the sake of a man who says he will not try any more? Do you suppose I would have done that for a coward? You have no right to give up. When you give up, you are throwing, not only yourself, but me away. If you do it, Herbert," she continued, solemnly and inexorably, "all your past will sink into insignificance compared with the dastardliness and cowardliness of this last act."

"That's true," he answered, unmoved. "A natural climax in depravity."

"A natural climax!" she exclaimed, scornfully, the memory of her multiplied sufferings rushing in upon her. "How can you think of your noble mother, whose blood is in your veins, and give voice to such a horrible thought as that?"

"How could I think of her and do the other things I

have done?" he asked, but her passion was stirring him. After a moment his face perceptibly softened, and looking into her eyes, he said, with a sad smile, "It does n't make much difference what we call it, Elsie, or how we explain it. I'm about done for."

There was something deeply pathetic in his smile. Elsie arose abruptly, crossed swiftly to his chair, and knelt beside him, with her head on his bosom.

"Oh, Bert, how I love you!" she moaned.

He supported her with one arm. With the other hand he smoothed her hair. It struck him at the time as a strange thing — indeed, as an evidence of his depravity — that he should be sitting there so cold and self-controlled while her heart was breaking.

"What do you love in me?" he asked, musingly, after a little. She did not answer, and he continued, "What is there about me to love? Just tell me one thing." Still she did not answer, and he went on, "If I should die to-morrow, do you know what people would say? They would say, 'Poor devil! I feel sorry for Elsie Clifford, but there are some things in this world worse than death.' That's what they would say."

"Don't!" she whispered, pressing tighter.

He fell into a moody silence. Elsie held herself motionless against him. The house was as noiseless as a tomb. Some one walked by, and the footfalls seemed to echo dismally. Then a vehicle rolled briskly by. After that all was still again until Elsie's pet kitten came into the room, and rubbed herself against Bert's foot with a plaintive mew. This sound seemed to recall Elsie, and she arose quietly and went back to her chair. Bert watched her silently for some minutes — she did not look at him — and then went over and sat down on

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the arm of her chair. There was an expression on her face which he had never seen there before, and which he did not want to see again.

"I did n't mean it," he said. "I am not as bad as that. I have not forgotten all that you have suffered for me. As long as I have memory I shall not forget it. I felt strong this morning, and all day, but somehow as soon as I entered the gate a great wave of despondency came over me. I never felt quite so depressed in all my life before. I am sick yet, Elsie, and weak. Be as charitable as you can."

"I am all charity for you," she answered.

She dropped her head softly upon his shoulder, not so much in affection as in weariness. Later she laid her hand upon his neck. Next she pressed his cheek with the same hand, and turned his head until his lips were against hers. There she held them, for a long, long time.

"God bless you and keep you!" she said, softly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EVANGELIST

CAROL DARLINGTON scarcely saw Kaltenborn for more than three weeks. His presence was required nightly at the church. The evangelist had come, and the revival was in full progress. The church was filled to the doors every night, and the mourners' benches were crowded with penitents.

During the third week of his ministrations, the evangelist was stricken with a hoarseness which incapacitated him for public speaking, and it was announced on a Thursday that there would be no services on the two following nights. On the next night Kaltenborn left his co-worker, the evangelist, who was being entertained by Mrs. Hicks, to amuse himself as best he could, and went to see Carol.

He found her in high spirits, and, it seemed to him, in a strongly materialistic mood. At least, there was a decided contrast between the atmosphere of her music-room and that of the scenes he had been watching nightly for over two weeks. Before the revival meetings began, Carol had been inclined to be slightly jocular with reference to them, and to-night she insisted, with a subtle gleam in her eye, on talking about them, though Kaltenborn would have preferred to talk about anything else.

Among the converts was a notorious trio of sisters who had bent their knees at the mourners' bench more

than once, but who had as often strayed away from the precepts there inculcated. With regard to this addition to Kaltenborn's flock, Carol was especially vivacious and sarcastic. Kaltenborn let her run on, without attempting much defence at first, preferring to watch the play of her handsome features, and to smile in an indulgent and superior way now and then. It seemed to him a great privilege to be in a position to smile so upon such a woman. A few short months before, such a thing would have seemed impossible ; but here he was doing it, in the most natural way in the world, and she seemed to enjoy it.

"Well, I'm very glad of one thing," he said, finally, falling into a more comfortable position.

"In connection with the Hyers girls?" she asked, quizzingly. "By all means let us have it."

"I am glad that you don't mean more than two per cent. of what you say."

"The margin of sincerity you allow me is extremely small, sir," she returned, with a charming pretence of severity that would have deceived no one.

"You won't say you are glad they are not in *your* church," he ventured.

"I am," she answered, promptly,—*"very glad, indeed."*

"Would you see them out of the church altogether before you would have them in your church?"

"I would."

"Why?" he asked, soberly.

"Because they are detestable hypocrites. They have gone through a so-called conversion nearly as many times as there have been evangelists in Ashboro. They are characterless, and they will stay in the church as

long as their present fright lasts, and no longer. They are dirty and slovenly, in spite of the finery and perfume they manage to secure by unknown means. They are dishonest; they outrage their neighbors by their scandalous conduct, and they are altogether a disgrace to the town. I think it is a shame for a decent, virtuous woman, whose tender conscience brings her to the altar for some peccadillo, to have to kneel there with those shameless creatures."

Kaltenborn had no desire to disparage this righteous burst of indignation, but he asked, quietly, "Do you think those women are hypocritical when they kneel at the altar and confess their sins before their fellow-townsmen?"

"I don't know that they are hypocritical," she answered, "but it is simply another manifestation of the animal nature which has made them what they are. They are scared."

"Don't you suppose they have regrets for their mis-spent lives? The Bible says that the way of the transgressor is hard. You and I know that it is so. May they not have found it out? Don't you suppose that they sometimes have longings for something higher and nobler than their base round of life? When they see women on the street who are respected and admired by the community, don't you suppose they have a desire, weak and vague, perhaps, to be like them?"

"I suppose they do, of course," she answered, yielding. "But their desire is so appallingly weak and vague and fleeting that I have n't any faith in it—or patience with it. And I'll tell you plainly, Mr. Kaltenborn, that if one of the requisites of a Christian life is to love such people, I can never be a Christian. I loathe them, and I

can't help it. I could give them money — though that, unfortunately, is not one of their wants ; I could even carry them food if they were sick. But I should be holding my moral breath until I got out of their presence."

"That feeling is perfectly natural," answered Kaltenborn, with a flavor of sarcasm. "As natural, I may say, as the animalism you condemn in them. It is a feeling shared by the mass of pure women. Yet it is not the spirit which filled Christ when he lifted up the Magdalen."

"There has been only one Christ," she answered.

"It is not quite the spirit which upheld George Washington during his eight years' struggle, not with England's armies, but with his own mutinous soldiers, an incompetent and helpless Congress, and an ungrateful country. It is not quite the spirit which has filled any of the world's great men and women."

"I never pretended to be great," she answered, coolly.

"I wish that you might."

"Perhaps I am too conscious of my limitations," she suggested, dryly.

"Your limitations are not strikingly noticeable," he returned. "You *are* great, in your way. You are a good railroad auditor, and I believe you would make a very good railroad president. You are pretty shrewd ; you have a will of your own. You have a deep affectional nature, I believe, — if you would only give it a chance. You are a little afraid of being tender, which is distinctly antithetical to greatness. But I should like to see you a little more charitable — especially toward such people as these Hyers women. I don't want you to relax one jot or

title of that instinctive hatred you have for their vices, for that hatred in pure women is the salvation of society. I only want you to remember that these women did not make themselves. Their low passions and their lack of integrity are a legacy, so far as I can learn, from their mother. These periodical repentances, which you regard as so contemptible, are flashes of their better nature. No one knows when those flashes will kindle a fire. That is why we take these women into our church, though we may believe that they will backslide again, as they have done so often in the past. They don't help the church any; they hurt it, rather, in the eyes of many well-meaning people. But the church as an institution is not to be considered with regard to benefits and injuries. The individual is the object of our solicitude."

"I don't feel a bit complimented by the pretty things you have said," she answered, with mock sulkiness. "I see the sermon sticking out of all of it." Then she continued, soberly, "I know that there is nothing more unlovely than a cynical or callous woman, and I know that those are just my faults. I try to overcome them, but as long as they are in me, I suppose it is best to let them come out — like bad blood," she added.

"Bad blood is not always best dealt with by being let out," answered Kaltenborn, smiling. "But as long as you have diagnosed your case so honestly, I think you can be trusted to prescribe for it. That reminds me; has your brother said anything to you about the talk we had?"

"He told me all about it," she answered. She paused, and he fancied she was about to express her gratitude; but she said, instead, "Some of your religious tenets somewhat staggered me."

"Why?" he asked, slightly resenting her tone.

"As coming from a Methodist minister," she explained. "Your ideas of Christ are a good deal like my own — those I keep away down on the bottom. I suppose we are both heretics."

"That word 'heretic' is not the bugbear it once was," he answered, shortly.

"No, but it has power enough yet to throw you out of your pulpit," she said. She looked at him closely, as though estimating the effect of her words.

"It would n't be the first time I have suffered expulsion for my opinions," he answered.

"Where, before?" she asked, not quite understanding his allusion.

"Out of the brewery, for one place," he answered, with a quaint smile. "Out of the law, for another."

"And if they throw you out of the church, where will you go?" she asked.

"I don't know. What would you suggest?"

"You might try railroading," she answered, whimsically.

"Would you give me a job?"

"What can you do?" she asked.

"Anything."

"I don't know. There are so many who can do that. You might begin with the presidency, though. Almost anybody can be a president. Then, if you succeeded at that, we should promote you until you finally became a brakeman or a fireman. Those are the most trying positions on the road, as the gentlemen who fill them will tell you themselves."

"I think I should prefer to start in as assistant auditor," he said, smiling.

"What are your special qualifications for that position?" There was an almost imperceptible change in her light, bantering tone — a little stiffening, as it were.

"Have you never discovered any?" he asked. They were sitting near together, and he looked her squarely, though not boldly, in the eyes. She quietly lowered the dark-fringed curtains, and smoothed the flounce of her skirt.

"If I have, would you want me to say so?"

"Yes."

Her lashes lifted momentarily, revealing a dark and enlarged pupil. "I have," she said. It was still play, perhaps.

"What are they?" he asked.

Again her flounce needed attention, but this time she gathered it fold by fold between her thumb and finger. "Are you not inquisitive?" she asked, in an undertone.

"Am I?"

"I think you are," she murmured.

He paused. The animation slowly died from his face, and then he assumed an upright position again, thus taking his face further from hers. "I think so, too," he said.

When he left, shortly after, Carol's cheeks still retained a feverish glow, and her eyes an unusual brightness.

"I will bring those poor people's names that you wanted from mamma around to-morrow morning," she said, at parting.

"Be sure," he admonished her, "because they need immediate attention. Or I can call and get them."

"No, I'll bring them in the morning," she repeated.

She did not, though. A dancing-party, presumably the last of the season, was to be given at Helen Dane's that night; and it was half-past eight, after she was dressed, before Carol thought of the names again. The last thing before leaving her room, therefore, she snatched up a piece of paper upon which to take down the names from her mother's dictation. She looked radiantly beautiful in her costume; yet, when she stepped into Ruth's room for something or other, that little maiden did not look longest, or first or last, at her sister's superb arms or velvety shoulders or perfect bosom. It was Carol's face, crowned and framed with its wealth of pale hair, upon which she dwelt with lustrous eyes. To-night the violet eyes were not quite so restless or proud as usual, but shone with a limpid tenderness even more beautiful.

"Oh, sweetheart!" cried Ruth, admiringly. "I wish I could go."

"You will be going, Babe, when I am a withered old maid," answered Carol, happily.

As she swiftly gathered her rustling skirts in one hand, at the head of the stairs, and gave them a little shake, Ruth glided up to her side, bent on witnessing her sister's triumph downstairs. Carol straightened, thrust out a white-slippered toe, and descended the stairs with the grace and assurance of a queen. They met Herbert at the foot, in evening dress.

"By Jove, sis!" he observed, "you must be out for blood to-night. Kaltenborn ought to see you now."

She colored a little, and only answered, "I am glad you are going. I was afraid you would n't."

"I hate it enough to stay away," he answered, with a

clouding face. It was his first social appearance since the trial of the new engine.

Mr. and Mrs. Darlington were both in the sitting-room. Mrs. Darlington looked up at the girls' entrance, and said quietly, "You look very nice, Carol." She had her views about spoiling children, but she had equally positive views about starving them with indifference. Carol fussed around the room, now at the mirror over the grate, now at the chiffonier, until Bert and Ruth went out again.

"Mamma, if you will give me those names now, I will leave them for Mr. Kaltenborn," she said, in a hurried, careless tone. "We drive right by."

"I would n't bother with that now," said her mother.

"I promised them for to-day, positively," said Carol, with a slight flush, and she hastily scribbled them down as her mother called them off. Then, tucking the paper away mysteriously in her corsage, she leaned her bare elbow against the mantel-piece. With her other hand she lightly lifted her skirts, and held her toe out to the blaze. She was not at all cold, though, judging from the glow on her cheeks.

Mr. Darlington looked up from his paper. This flesh and blood of his own stirred his heart as did few other things in the world. He was proud of her beauty; he respected her intelligence; and, deep in his heart, he was just a little awed by her fidelity to certain principles.

"What's on to-night?" he asked, as though he had not heard the event at the Danes' talked of daily for two weeks.

"Nothing much," answered Carol, carelessly, to punish him for his tardy interest. The mother glanced from

daughter to husband. In all the years she had not learned to understand these little sparring-matches between Carol and her father. Darlington returned to his paper, and Carol walked to the centre of the room, directly in front of him.

"I hardly know what wrap to wear," she observed, reflectively, to her mother. "I don't know — I think I'll wear the swan's-down. There is Cash now," she added, at the sound of wheels at the *porte cochère*. "Good-bye, everybody."

Her father did not answer; she paused, and a moment later a pair of soft arms stole around his neck. She chose to let herself be conquered this time.

"Papa, why don't you say how you like me?" she asked, feigning an injured tone.

"You'll do," he answered, lightly, without lifting his eyes.

"You have n't looked at me," she protested.

"Yes, I have."

"What have I on, then?"

"Oh, I did n't know *that* was to be looked at," he answered, dryly.

Mrs. Darlington glanced up doubtfully, but Carol, bending over, tucked her face in her father's neck, and laughed naughtily.

"If you were n't so old and cross, papa, don't you think you would fall in love with me?" she exclaimed, coquettishly.

"You will have all that powder off your arms next, on my coat," he grumbled.

"There's none on," she retorted. "Don't you think you would?"

"Don't bother me. Your mother, when I married

her, could give you cards and spades on beauty ; but it was a long time before I decided to love her."

"That is n't mamma's story," answered Carol, tauntingly. For a moment she blew girlishly at his whiskers. "Well, I said good-bye," she reminded him.

"So did I."

"You did not."

"Good-bye, then."

"Some fathers kiss their children good-bye," she suggested, half smothering him with her hair and arms and perfume. The crow's-feet around Darlington's eyes now wrinkled in a smile, and he surrendered. He placed his hand on her head, in spite of her cries that he would spoil her hair, and pressed her mouth to his. "Trot along, now," he said. He made no remarks after she had gone, but he read over the first paragraph of railroad items four times before he got started down the column.

"Please tell the driver to stop at Mrs. Hicks's," said Carol to Winter, as he helped her into the carriage.

"What for?" he asked.

"I have some names for him — for Mr. Kaltenborn."

"Names!"

"Yes, names of people — poor people," she said, with some sharpness. Cash acknowledged his implied stupidity with an "Oh!" and gave the necessary directions.

Mrs. Hicks came to the door, and led Carol back to Kaltenborn's study, and rapped for her. Kaltenborn called "Come!" and Carol pushed the door partly open, still standing on the threshold. Her first impression was that she smelled a cigar, — and a very poor one. At the same instant her eyes fell upon a gaunt, sandy-haired man with glasses, in the further corner of the study. He

was just withdrawing his hand from the foliage of a potted plant, and Carol received the impression that he was concealing his cigar there.

"I beg your pardon," she said to Kaltenborn, who at once arose and came forward. "I have those names for you," she added, in a lower tone. As they moved away from the study door by tacit consent, she went on, "I forgot them until this evening, — which I hope you will forgive, — and then I scribbled them down from mamma's dictation in a shorthand style that I don't believe you can read, after all." Kaltenborn motioned her into the parlor, where she finished with, "I'll re-write them, — it will take only a second, — if you will give me a pencil."

He brought her paper and pencil, and she sank down into a chair. Dropping the silk scarf from her head to her shoulders, she brought from under her downy cloak an arm gloved to the elbow, and began to write, — in a slightly labored way, owing to her tight glove. The richly dressed figure with its elaborate coiffure; the dim, yellow light, which suffered by contrast with the marble radiance of her face; the black-garbed, motionless preacher; the humble room, — these formed a striking picture. Its effect on Kaltenborn was rather unexpected. He appeared not to see Carol at all, not even when she shook her cloak still further back, and revealed a glimpse of her bare arm. He stared steadily at the page she was writing, and when she handed him the list, he thanked her gravely.

"I will give you one of these, if you want it," she said, laying her hand upon her roses. She looked at him sharply, and received his affirmative before she pulled out one of the half-blown buds.

"Was that your evangelist?" she asked, drawing her cloak close about her again.

"Yes."

"Does he smoke?"

Kaltenborn's face reddened a trifle, but he maintained his grave, dignified air. "Yes," he answered. "He says it helps his catarrh."

The tones of both were cold, and hers half-contemptuous as well. At the door Kaltenborn stood with his hand on the knob for what seemed a long time, as if he had something further to say. She fancied he might be going to apologize for his inexplicable coldness; but he did not, and after a moment she said, "Please let me out." He opened the door with a scarcely audible good-night, and let her pass.

He stood there for a moment. She had gone — his friend, his dearest friend — to a ball, while in the next room, awaiting him, sat a fellow-worker in the church who, only two nights before, had thundered against the dance. Kaltenborn was tempted for the moment to rush out into the night, and tell Carol why he had been so cold.

He left his rose in the parlor, and returned to the study. The evangelist had resumed his catarrhal treatment, with perfect fortitude, if not, indeed, absolute gusto; blowing the smoke out — after it had performed its healing function — as skilfully as C. A. Darlington could have done it himself.

"Who was that woman, brother?" he asked, complacently. His powerful glasses gave his eyes a staring, bulging appearance.

"Her name is Carol Darlington," answered Kaltenborn, as he glanced over the list in his hand.

The evangelist smoked a moment in silence. No one,

after looking into his eyes at that moment, would have taken him for a fool — or a saint.

"Railroad president's daughter?" he asked, smoothly.

"Yes."

"Going to give a theatre party down the line, in her pa's private car, next Friday?"

"Not that I know of," said Kaltenborn, looking up inquiringly.

The evangelist looked as though he rather doubted Kaltenborn's ignorance on this subject, but freely pardoned the pretence. "She is," he said.

"How do you know? — if I may ask."

The evangelist stared meditatively at the ceiling, dusky with the lamp-smoke of many a year. "Some of the brethren told me," he answered, finally. "They suggested that I might make a good stroke for the Lord by holding off my sermon on theatre-going until the night after this party, and then giving it a local, or, I may say, a personal application. I have about decided to do that," he added, significantly.

Kaltenborn instinctively knew that the man was watching him, and he did not change a muscle of his face. After a moment the evangelist continued: "She's a personal friend of yours, ain't she?"

"Has any one told you so, Mr. McAndrews?" asked Kaltenborn bluntly, eying him with unmistakable pugnacity.

Far from resenting this display of spirit, the evangelist leaned forward with a shrewd, droll look on his gaunt features. "I may say, Kaltenborn, without breach of confidence, that they have. And it was hinted that if she had been less of a friend of yours, you would be a better preacher. Don't flare up, now! I don't take

any stock in that rot myself. I was a lonely young preacher myself once. God knows I am lonely enough now, for that matter, seeing my wife and children once in three months sometimes, and sometimes not. And I still hanker after the beautiful and the refined. But it don't do, Stephen," he continued, familiarly, and Kaltenborn smiled in spite of himself at the man's impudence. "You will find, if you look into the matter, that it's generally the odor of a flesh-pot that attracts you. And while we could overlook a little of that," he smiled, with suave knavery, "it will get you into hot water up to your eyes, sooner or later. But" — and he paused impressively — "I like you. I like that woman. She looks like a whole-souled creature. If you say the good word, I will withdraw that sermon on theatre-going."

"I would n't have you do it on my account for ten thousand dollars," said Kaltenborn, quickly.

"If you are indifferent, all right," said McAndrews, with a shrug. "Perhaps it is best, as long as I have promised the brethren. But I'll warn you that, in the words of a beloved and sanctified, but very blunt old presiding elder of mine, I am going to give the theatre 'hell.' I am going to give them a sermon that has brought more than one society belle to the altar — and may bring *her*. Good-night, brother."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TEST OF FRIENDSHIP

KALTENBORN walked back to the parlor for his flower. The delicate essence which Carol had left behind was still sensible to his nostrils, and he closed his eyes and tried to fancy her still present. This failing, he returned to his study and sat down at his desk, with the rose in one hand and the pencil which Carol had used in the other. Suddenly he pressed the latter to his lips.

The next moment he had thrown it the length of the room, and with a bitter smile on his lips he deliberately began to pick the flower to pieces. When it was only a litter of torn petals, when he had brushed them into his waste-basket, when it was too late, his act struck him as a heartless piece of brutality, as sacrilege almost, and he could have cried.

Never in his life before had he felt so lonely. Cut off from his church by Carol, cut off from Carol by his church, regarding his love for her as a weakness and a violation of conscience, at the same time despising the people who had condemned his friendship for her, he was really in a mood for desperate deeds.

He pictured Carol at the ball, in all her purity and beauty, swinging with rhythmic movement to the soft music, supported by the arm of another man, her cheeks aglow with pleasure, her eyes sparkling. Or she was

sitting in some secluded nook, listening to murmured pleasantries. Of what moment, he reflected bitterly, were those quiet talks he had had with her in the music-room compared with all this gayety? Quiet talks! He sniffed the words contemptuously. *He* could not even smoke for her.

He glanced down at his sombre ministerial frock with something like loathing. He had not always worn such a frock. What was he wearing one now for? To stand in a pulpit and preach a gospel that he did not more than half believe; to announce himself to the world as the priest of a body of people whose opinions and ideals he, for the most part, held in sovereign contempt.

In these reflections, unjust both to himself and to Carol, he did not wholly forget that those eyes which were now sparkling for another man had once filled with tears for him. He knew that tears were more than sparkles. He knew, in his heart, that this balancing of Carol's amusements against the serious side of her life was unjust; for she was not given over to social pleasures. He knew, too, that a large measure of his present contempt for the church was chargeable to his contempt for that one of its ministers who had just left the room. And he knew that that man was not a fair representative of his class. But in his present bitter mood he was not particular to be discriminating, or even just.

Carol's silence toward him in the matter of her theatre party also hurt him. It seemed to argue a lack of confidence in him, and to class him with those narrow-minded people who censured such amusements. Added to this was the evangelist's promised sermon against theatre-going. Kaltenborn knew well what that sermon would be, coming from such a man. It

*alcoholism -
disease
unclothed
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Hobbes
opponent
write minutes*

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meant a tirade, a low appeal to bigotry, and in this particular case a stirring of the passions of the poor against the rich. He dreaded that sermon, and its probable effect upon his relations with Carol; but he would not have lifted his little finger, clandestinely, to prevent it. He did not, however, mean to sit down helplessly, and let events have their own destructive way. That was not his nature. In pursuance of a resolution he had arrived at, he made his appearance on Monday morning at the office of the auditor of the High Point, Rankelman, Ashboro, and Southern Railroad.

"It's business, I see by your face," said Carol, laughing, forcing herself to forget Kaltenborn's coolness of Saturday night. "You are very unsophisticated. If you want a favor from the railroad — and of course you do — you ought to saunter in here in an idle way, laugh and joke for half an hour, until you get me into a good humor, and then suddenly spring your request. I could then graciously do only one thing — grant it."

"I should hate to trap you in any such way, least of all on my present errand," answered Kaltenborn, quite soberly.

"Oh, so serious as that!" she exclaimed, affecting a levity that she did not feel.

"It is very serious for me," he returned. "You are going to give a theatre party at High Point next Friday night. I knew nothing of it until last Saturday night, after I had seen you," he added, looking pointedly at her. "Mr. McAndrews, the evangelist, told me, just after you left, that some of my members had suggested to him that next Saturday night would be an opportune time for him to preach a sermon against theatre-going.

He seems to think well of the suggestion, and it is his present intention to preach the sermon."

Carol had dropped her cheek upon her hand, and was looking at him with round, interested eyes, in which there was the faintest gleam of excitement.

"I know what kind of a sermon he will preach," continued Kaltenborn. "It will be a good deal like the one my predecessor preached on a similar occasion. It may be worse. It will, in any event, be plain enough for any one to understand at whom it is aimed. Some of my members were also kind enough to tell McAndrews that you were an intimate friend of mine, and to hint that our intimacy had something to do with my silence in the pulpit on the subject of amusements. McAndrews, hypocrite though I believe him to be, is a man of some liberality. He thunders against these things simply because it is his business to do so, and he offered, in view of the relations between you and me, to withdraw the sermon. In my heart, I believe the withdrawal of that sermon would best serve the interests of my church, just as I believe that the church would have been better off without this evangelist. In the latter matter, though, I gave way to the views of my people, and in common honesty I had to do the same with regard to this sermon on theatre-going. I therefore told him that I could not allow him to withdraw the sermon on my account."

He paused, as if hoping Carol might make some comment. But she did not break her silence, and he went on, —

"Perhaps you will understand my motives without further explanation. The point is this: If he preaches that sermon, *at you*, our intercourse must cease. As pastor of the church I shall be held as supporting

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McAndrews's views. I cannot make a public disclaimer. That being the case, your friends could hardly understand why you should continue to countenance me ; and my members could hardly understand how I, after tacitly consenting to your public denunciation, could continue my friendship in private. In short, a continuation of my visits at your house would jeopardize the respect in which you are held by your friends, and would jeopardize my usefulness in the church."

This was sufficiently important to justify another stop. Carol continued her gaze with eyes of augmented brilliancy. Kaltenborn saw her throat swell, but she did not help him out with a single word.

"I came here," he concluded, abruptly, "to ask you, for the sake of our friendship, to give up your party."

Carol must have guessed, from the tension around his mouth, what it cost to say those simple words. But for a moment her admiration was submerged under a tempest of rougher emotions. She wanted to denounce the narrowness of Kaltenborn's church members, and to scathe, with her ready tongue, the hypocrite who, for pay, would publicly blacken an innocent woman's reputation. She wanted to call Kaltenborn's attention, in scornful tones, to the cowardice of giving up a harmless pleasure in order to escape the abuse of a ranting evangelist. Lastly, she wanted to point out the incongruity of a friendship requiring such a peculiar sacrifice.

But something in Kaltenborn's face seemed to tell her that he knew all this even better than she ; and that he was appealing to something higher in her than even courage or justice or tolerance. Something else restrained her, too,—the hardihood of the man in so

coolly preferring a request involving a sacrifice of such magnitude, and his unmistakable sincerity in so doing.

"Are you aware of the extraordinary nature of that request, Mr. Kaltenborn?" she asked, in a voice that throbbed a little with indignation in spite of her self-restraint.

"I am," he answered, with an irresistible grandeur. "It is so extraordinary that I should never have dared to make it of any but an extraordinary woman."

"You are asking me to disappoint twenty friends in order to favor one."

"In order to *save* one," he corrected. Once more he went carefully over the ground to convince her of the inevitable consequences of her party, and to show his own helplessness. "I don't know that I need to say it," he concluded, "but I am asking no more than I would give. I have been thinking this question over every waking hour since last Saturday night. I realize to the full the self-denial, the forgiveness, the nobility, which the sacrifice calls for. But, believe me, — without belittling that sacrifice, — if I were asked to do it for you, it seems to me it would be the easiest thing in the world."

It did look so, she had no doubt, from the heights on which he stood. She did not admit the inaccessibility of those heights to herself, but she resented the necessity of ascending them. Turn as she might, though, never in her life before had she been so clearly conscious of being on trial. Yet she stubbornly fought against the conviction, and held it off as long as she could.

"Mr. Kaltenborn, I feel deeply in this matter," she said, finally. "Your friendship is not a thing that I could lightly let go. I would sacrifice a great deal to

keep it. But I think you have fallen into your old habit of taking things too seriously. I don't believe that wrong can ever put down right. Why should this evangelist come between us, no matter what the circumstances? Do you know, I don't believe it is ever right to be weak — and that is what you are asking me to be. You are asking me to give way in a matter of principle for the sake of expediency. That is," she explained, at his dissenting expression over these blunt words, "you want me to give up what I consider a harmless amusement simply because somebody else considers it not harmless. And as for my friends falling off, in case I should countenance you after your apparent sanction of my public denunciation, I don't believe you quite do justice to the respect my friends have for me. And you don't mean to say, do you, that any great number of your members would discountenance your associating with me, even though this man did deliver his diatribe?"

"They would," answered Kaltenborn, decidedly. "Your family is wealthy. You belong to an aristocratic church. My people are poor, and belong to a democratic church. Many of your pleasures are hopelessly beyond their reach, and others of them cross their consciences. For me, their pastor, to associate with you, is a thorn in their flesh at the best. I have seen it all along, and it has troubled me. More than once I have thought it my duty to give up your friendship, for the sake of the work I have already given up so much for. But you have helped me in more ways than one, and I am doubtful even now as to what my duty is. Yet those doubts will be removed if you persist in giving your party; for, take my word for it, I see a crisis at hand. The only question for you should be — Is it worth

while? Is a friendship requiring such a peculiar sacrifice founded on reason? Is it worthy of continuation? Is it not, in the end, destined to perish anyhow?"

"What do you think about it?" she asked, with a curious intonation.

"Last night I thought it was worth while. To-day I don't know."

"Have I had anything to do with the change?" she asked.

"I don't know that, either," he returned, shortly.

She sat thinking for a moment, her lips tightly pressed together, and her mouth drooping a little stubbornly at the corners. But after a little these sharp corners relaxed somewhat.

"You said a minute ago," she observed, "that you were asking no more than you would give. Did you suspect it might be more than I should be willing to give?"

"The thought occurred to me," he answered, frankly.

"Then you give me credit for less magnanimity than you claim for yourself."

"No. Our friendship may not mean as much to you as it does to me."

She seemed to attach no special significance to his words, for her serious face underwent no change. But she had a faculty, as he had learned, of feigning calmness in even crucial moments.

"Would that make any difference, if I were really magnanimous?" she asked, argumentatively. "Might n't I give up simply for your sake, — or because it was right?" She turned upon him a pair of eyes so tranquil, so impersonal, that he experienced a disagreeable sensation.

"I didn't ask it on those grounds," he returned, shortly, "and I could not accept it on them."

"Do you think, Mr. Kaltenborn, that you have a right to ask it on any other?" Her eyes were a little dilated, and each pupil seemed to contain a point of fire; but it was impossible for him to tell whether her tone was favorable or unfavorable.

"It is for you to pass on that," he returned, steadily, and the color suddenly mounted to her cheeks.

"I must think it over — your proposition," she said, hastily. "But if papa knew that I was going to give up my party because that evangelist had threatened to slander me, what do you suppose he would say?"

"You are not giving it up for any such reason," answered Kaltenborn, warmly.

"If papa knew I was giving it up for *you*, what do you suppose he would say?" she asked.

"He would probably say that you were a fool," answered Kaltenborn, bluntly.

She winced, and asked, half ironically, "What do you suppose your people, the Methodists, would say?"

"They would probably think that the evangelist had scared you," he answered, with uncompromising frankness.

"And what would you think?" she asked, and in spite of her admirable self-possession there was a slight huskiness in her voice.

"I should try not to think too much," he answered. She did not lift her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PROVIDENTIAL INTERVENTION

CAROL gave herself until Wednesday night to come to a decision. Sometimes Kaltenborn's request seemed hopelessly quixotic ; at other times it seemed logical and natural. But for the most part it seemed quixotic, and she told herself, over and over again, that it was so. Yet somewhere within her consciousness she knew that these repetitions were a vain lie, and that in the end she would give in to Kaltenborn.

This conviction sometimes goaded her to fierceness. She would then whip her pride up until compliance with Kaltenborn's request seemed downright immodesty — an odious bid for his friendship, and — why deny it to herself? — his love. Not that she felt fully ready to requite such a feeling, or was sure that she could ever requite it. But somehow, of late, she had allowed herself to think unflinchingly of his love. She had come to regard it as her right. She had come to regard him as a kind of *protégé* of hers, who, in common gratitude, should bestow upon her all his devotion. At least, she could not imagine him as loving any one else. Hence, in her moments of mortified pride, she told herself hotly that she would not bid for what was already rightfully hers.

She finally went to her father, less for advice than for moral support. She had an idea that he would deride

her weakness clean out of existence. His derision was keen enough, in all reason ; but so far from casting out her fancied weakness, it seemed only to root it more firmly, and she found herself siding with Kaltenborn against her father.

"I want to do what is *right*," she said, with her clear, straightforward gaze. "It will be a little queer to withdraw the invitations now, and a few may suspect the real reason. But I don't care for that, as long as *he* doesn't misconstrue my action."

"Misconstrue it how?" asked her father.

"Well, if I do this, the inference is that I attach some value to his friendship," she answered, with a trifle of confusion.

"So I take it," said her father, dryly. "And you're afraid he will misconstrue it, and take it that you attach no value to his friendship?"

"He may think that I attach more value than I do," she answered with dignity, ignoring his irony.

The president drew out his knife, and began to sharpen a pencil, the keen blade cutting through the soft cedar without perceptible effort. "As a matter of fact," he continued, blowing the parings away, "how much *do* you value his friendship?"

"That's a leading question," she answered, laughing, and coloring a little. "I like him very much. He is original and manly and intelligent, and I think his society does me more good than that of anybody else I know. That's about the extent of it." She looked at him very innocently.

"How much do you think he values *your* friendship?" asked her father, still busy with his pencil.

"I don't know," she answered, conservatively. "I

fancy, though, that he thinks fully as much of mine as I think of his. If he did n't, he would hardly ask me to do this."

"I have an idea, Carol," said Mr. Darlington, "that he thinks more of it. I have an idea that he thinks a good deal more of it." He paused. A peculiar luminosity flashed up in Carol's eyes, and then was instantly quenched. "Still, if you want to give up your party for the sake of seeing him three or four times a month until he moves away next fall, give it up. It's nobody's business but your own."

"It is n't certain that he 'll move," she said.

"From what he told me the other day, it is pretty certain. He's too broad-minded for these people. He's the broadest-minded preacher I ever knew, I think. But he has some queer ideas. He has ideas that don't square with yours and mine, and never will." He paused again, but Carol said nothing. "Not one man in a thousand would ask a woman to do what he has asked you to do, and I don't think one woman in a thousand would do it, — unless she loved him." Another pause. Under his keen scrutiny, Carol flushed slightly, but still said nothing. "It never crossed his mind that it would cost you anything to give up that party."

"It would n't, papa," was her astonishing answer.

"What do you mean?" asked her father, almost sternly.

"I mean that the way matters stand, I would sooner give the party up than not, — if it's right."

"All right," he assented, with some acidity. "If you feel that way, the thing for you to do is to give it up. But I'll tell you this, — it would n't make any difference to him whether it cost you something or not. Such

considerations don't stop a man like Kaltenborn. When such men think they are right, they will have their way, if it takes a leg, — or breaks a heart. I can be bull-headed enough myself, up to where it begins to draw blood out of somebody, and then I cave. But you take one of these fanatics, and he's got no heart. The crying of a woman is no more to him than the squalling of a cat, — and many a woman has found it out to her sorrow."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Kaltenborn is a fanatic," asked Carol, ominously.

"I mean to say that he is just that fanatical," answered her father, valorously, for his blood was up.

A slightly sarcastic smile overspread Carol's proud features. But quickly, as if recognizing the unlovableness of this, her face softened, and she asked, conciliatingly, "Is n't that a good way to be, sometimes?"

"It's a good enough way for the infallible God to be," her father answered, forcibly. "But when a narrow, bigoted, short-sighted, faulty man tries it on — and they are the only men that do try it — there is misery ahead for somebody, — and it's generally a woman."

"Papa, do you mean to apply those odious epithets to Mr. Kaltenborn?" she asked again, the ominous calm now settling unmistakably.

"No! I mean that red-headed evangelist," he returned, fiercely. "If I had my way, I'd split his tongue and put him to work in a treadmill." He chewed his cigar savagely for a moment; but, Carol saying nothing, he soon continued, more temperately: "But Kaltenborn's judgment is poor. He left his father's brewery, where he was probably getting four or five thousand dollars a year, to go into the law. Then, not satisfied with

that, he went into the ministry, and cut himself off from the old man's good will and his millions. To-day he is working for eight or nine hundred dollars a year. I have no use for breweries, God knows, but why did n't he abide his time? His leaving the brewery did not reduce the output of beer a single barrel, whereas if he had stayed until the business had come into his hands, he could have sold the brewery and put the proceeds into charity — if that's his idea. Or he could have torn it down, if he did n't want any more beer to be made there, and still have had plenty of money. Think of the poor-houses, asylums, and hospitals he could have built! But no, he had to go and preach, and here he is in Ashboro, locked up in a nutshell."

For a little there was silence. Carol was evidently impressed, but she only said, with a rueful smile, "Well, this does n't help me any."

"I had hopes that it would," he answered, almost appealingly. Before she had time to take him up, he added, "If I make a decision for you, will you abide by it?"

"What is it, first?" she asked, laughing girlishly.

"No! I make no decisions on approval." He turned to his desk, and began to read some letters. She watched him a moment with troubled eyes, and after a little he said, "You talk it over with your mother."

She did so that evening. Somewhat to Carol's surprise, her mother took the communication very calmly, indeed. This pleased Carol, secretly, but it was about the only feature of the interview that did please her. Mrs. Darlington seemed to take about the same view of the matter that her husband had taken, namely, that such a request implied something more than mere friendship.

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In her heart, Carol recognized the justness of this assumption, yet it vexed her that they should make it.

After telling her daughter that it was a matter which she would have to decide for herself, Mrs. Darlington added, "I hope you may never forfeit Mr. Kaltenborn's admiration. But you say you regard him only as a friend, and, Carol, I want you to be very careful not to do anything that could possibly lead him to think otherwise."

"But how can I claim to be even his friend if I cut him loose in this fashion?" argued Carol, patiently. "And do you suppose, mamma, that he could make such a mistake as that?"

"Men have made greater mistakes," answered her mother.

When Mr. and Mrs. Darlington were left alone at bedtime, he asked her if Carol had spoken to her about the theatre party, and asked her what she had told the girl.

"I told her that I did n't think she was called upon to give it up," answered Mrs. Darlington.

"What did she say?" asked Darlington, amiably, rather pleased that his views should have been confirmed by his wife.

"She did n't say what she would do, and I did n't ask her. I could see she was troubled about it. I wish she was n't—quite so much. I think Mr. Kaltenborn appeals very strongly to her. I fancied she would get tired of him in a month, but he comes oftener than ever. For some reasons I am not sorry. Yet—" She hesitated a moment, and ended with, "He has a good deal of influence over her, and for the best, I believe. She never mentions it—she would n't, anyhow; but now and then she drops something."

"I never heard her drop anything," said Darlington, dissentingly.

Mrs. Darlington entered into no details, but simply said, "She has changed her views regarding a great many things. For the better, too, I must say, in most cases."

"Well, I admire the man myself, in some ways," answered Darlington, indirectly defending Carol.

"We all do, I think," said his wife, quietly.

"I don't think her saying those things cuts any figure," he continued. "They are pretty level-headed, both of them. They understand each other. He knows her place, and she knows it." He waited for his wife to assent to this, but as she did not he went on: "Carol is a little bit of a coquette in an innocent way. Most women are, for that matter. But she's got too much sense and too much honor to tamper with a man like Kaltenborn. I sounded her pretty well myself, to-day," he added, importantly.

"She's too deep for me to sound," said his wife, half-plaintively. "She's so different from Bert. Sometimes I think it was a mistake to let her go into the office, Charles. She is naturally independent and headstrong, and I think being in the office has made her more so."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Darlington, amiably. "It has been her salvation. You tie a girl like her down to cleaning up her room and working doilies and looking pleasant, and she'll go to the dogs."

"I don't think either of our girls would do that, Charles," remonstrated his wife.

"She is just as likely to do it as somebody else's girl," returned Darlington, coolly — too coolly to mean it.

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"She's got to be tied down that way some day — when she's married," said his wife.

"She'll have a boss then," he retorted.

"I don't think she will ever marry a boss," observed Mrs. Darlington, gravely.

"She'll never marry any one else," he returned, taking up his paper. That Kaltenborn had the timber in him for the very best kind of a boss may have just struck him, and may have had something to do with his silence.

"I don't fancy there is anything between them yet," observed Mrs. Darlington, striking home in Darlington's thoughts with a precision that made him wince. "But when a girl begins to give up her parties for a man, one can't tell where it will end."

"She has n't given up any parties yet," answered Darlington, with some asperity.

"I believe she will," said his wife, firmly.

"Well, if she does, I guess we can't stop her. And if we could, I guess it would n't do any good. So there you are."

When Carol entered her father's office the following morning, with hat and jacket on, and a bundle of square envelopes in her hand, and said, in a voice not quite natural, and with a half-frightened smile, "Here are the cancellations of the theatre-party invitations," it cannot be said that Darlington was surprised. Nevertheless, the act gave him a disagreeable turn. He gave her a quick glance, and grunted, "All right."

"You are angry," she said, with an appealing look.

"What the deuce should I be angry about?" he asked, knocking his papers about in quite a purposeless way. "It is n't my funeral."

"I hope it is n't mine, either." Her tones were so humble that his conscience smote him, and looking up he asked more softly, —

"Why should I be angry?"

"Because I did n't take your advice," she said, sweetly.

"I did n't give you any advice," he returned.

"If you don't want me to send them, papa, I'll tear them up right now," she said, coming nearer.

"It's a matter of no moment to me," he answered smoothly, but stubbornly.

"I won't send them!" she exclaimed.

"Do just as you please."

"Papa, I've had trouble enough already about this," she began, turbulently.

"Am I troubling you?" he asked, affecting innocence. "Go on and mail your letters. You know your own business better than I do. I have n't the slightest objection to your mailing them."

"You act as though you had," she complained.

"I have n't."

As Carol walked down the main street toward the post-office, she saw Ethel Dane and another young woman coming toward her. The chances were ten to one that they would make some mention of the party, which would prove exceedingly embarrassing to Carol at that juncture. With a guilty flush she turned into the first door that offered escape, which happened to be that of a drug-store. The alert clerk was altogether too prompt for her in her flurried condition. For a moment she could not fix her mind upon a single article in the varied display before her that she could reasonably ask for, and then she perversely called for some

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quinine. The clerk wanted to know first how much, then whether she wanted it in bulk or in capsules, and then in what size capsules — simple questions enough, but it taxed her ingenuity to answer them. While these details were being settled, Carol saw the two girls pass the window. After paying for the quinine, at the same time assuring the garrulous clerk that no one was especially sick, she sallied out into the street again, thoroughly vexed with herself, and not a little ashamed.

When she was within two doors of the post-office, a passing messenger-boy on a bicycle suddenly veered in to the curbstone, dismounted, and handed her a telegram. She received too many telegrams in the course of business to have any of the awe for them that most women have, and she opened this one very coolly. It was from the manager of the opera-house at High Point, and announced that the building had burned to the ground the night before, and that there would, as a matter of course, be no entertainment on Friday night.

Just how glad Carol was to receive that telegram, she did not realize for a moment or two. It came like a reprieve to a condemned criminal — too good news to be instantly comprehended. Then she swung around, and walked briskly up the street. She had a wild desire to throw the package of tinted envelopes in her hand high into the air, and give a little yell. But foregoing these undignified demonstrations, she strode on, with a vigorous step and head well up. A little further on she ran squarely into Ethel Dane and her companion.

"The opera-house at High Point has burned to the ground!" were Carol's first words.

"You are joking!" cried Miss Dane, aghast. Carol handed her the telegram.

"It's a heartless shame!" exclaimed the young lady, with a stamp. "I just this minute tried on my new gown for the last time."

"Well, I did n't burn it," said Carol, without the least regret.

"I don't know; I believe you did," said Miss Dane, with very pretty petulance. "You have a kind of 'successful incendiary' grin on your face. I believe you burnt it just to get out of giving a party. You don't look a bit sorry — does she, Edith? Oh, dear! Well, good-bye. Your correspondence must be growing," she added, as her sweeping gaze lighted upon Carol's envelopes. "Why don't you mail them?"

"That's a pretty shirt-waist, Ethel," said Carol, without a blush.

"Like it?" exclaimed the other, carelessly plucking out the bosom. "That doesn't make me feel a bit better. Good-bye. I'll never forgive you, remember that!"

The first thing Carol did upon returning to her office was to lock up the notes of cancellation in a private drawer, to await a convenient and safe destruction. The second thing was to tell her father the news.

"Well," he remarked, non-committally.

"I'm glad," she said.

"Kaltenborn won't be," said her father, maliciously.

"Why?" she asked, but the same thought had already crossed her own mind.

"It robs him of a little victory. He won't know now whether you wrestled successfully with your bad angel or not."

"It is n't necessary that he should know."

"Oh, yes, it is," he returned, with his light irony.

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"You must tell him all about it, and mention the fact that you had the very notes to cancel the engagement in your hands when the telegram came. Then he will tell the red-headed evangelist, and maybe he won't skin you, after all."

"Papa, you can be pretty mean when you want to," said Carol, turning away.

CHAPTER XXIX

UNTYING A KNOT

NEVERTHELESS, Darlington's words had their intended effect. Carol wrote Kaltenborn a note telling him that the burning of the opera-house had settled her vexed question. It was not quite honest, she felt ; but in her strait she blinked at this fact, and soothed her conscience by promising herself to tell Kaltenborn the whole truth, should he touch upon the matter. She despatched the note to Mrs. Hicks's house by the office-boy.

Kaltenborn called that evening, to Carol's surprise. She had supposed his presence would be required at the "protracted meetings," as they were officially called. He made no explanation, however, of his absence from the church, and she, for some reason, did not want to ask him for any. In her penitence over that unfair note, which had given her more than one twinge of conscience during the day, Carol was unusually gracious. Kaltenborn was in a reciprocal mood. There was a vein of tenderness in his voice ; he moved about with a lightness unusual in him ; he talked about the results of the evangelistic meetings — after Carol had introduced the subject — in a favorable tone, quite in contrast with his usual manner ; he spoke kindly of the evangelist ; and when Carol opened the whole question of the usefulness of evangelists, taking Kaltenborn's old stand against

them, he canvassed the other side of the question with judicial fairness. Summing all this up, Carol suspected that Kaltenborn was in trouble of some kind, and that it had subdued him. At last he asked, rather abruptly :

"Had you come to any conclusion about giving up your party when you received the telegram announcing the burning of the opera-house?"

"What did you think?" she asked, evasively.

"Your note was obviously intended to convey the impression that you had not," he answered.

Carol reddened. The very simplicity and unconsciousness of his imputation gave it a sting which he perhaps would not knowingly have inflicted.

"I *had*," she answered. He waited for her to go on, and she asked, "Did you try to guess what my conclusion was?"

"I did not. I had no means of knowing."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Kaltenborn, that you were in real doubt as to what I should do?" she asked, with some feeling.

"How could I be otherwise," he answered, "when you were in doubt yourself the last time I saw you?"

"Sometimes a man knows a woman better than she knows herself," she answered, with a peculiar intonation. "Excuse me a moment," she added, rising and leaving the room. When she came back, she placed in his hands a package of square envelopes, addressed and stamped, and held together by a rubber band. "Read any one of those," she said; and when he had done it, she added, "I had those in my hands, and was at the post-office door, when that telegram was received."

She was standing by his side, her figure drawn up a little proudly. Kaltenborn looked up into her serious

face with a searching glance, and as he looked, his own face became illuminated.

"Why did you write these notes?" he asked, gently.

"Why?" she repeated, blankly. "Why — why, because you wanted me to," and the tell-tale blood flooded her cheeks. She attempted to turn away, but Kaltenborn suddenly took her hands, and drew himself up beside her, the envelopes falling in a shower upon the floor.

"Carol, I love you," he began, in a firm, purposeful tone. "I have loved you for a long time, and now I must tell you. I can't occupy this anomalous position any longer. It is right that you should know I love you, even though that knowledge ends all."

Carol stood with both her hands in his, her head slightly bowed, her eyes directed downward toward her hands. Her expression was tranquil, and thoughtful, and respectful. The least compression showed about her mouth.

They stood thus for some time, motionless and speechless. Then Carol's lips relaxed a little, as though she was going to speak, and her face lifted slightly; but nothing came of it. Kaltenborn gazed at her with a rare tenderness, and pressed her hands together between his.

"It is this secret which has been spoiling me," he went on, softly, lest the spell which bound her should be broken. "I have been like a man stricken with disease who is afraid to go to a physician and learn the worst; who, from fear of the surgeon's knife, lets the insidious growth gnaw out his vitals. But I am not afraid of the knife any longer, — if it be necessary to use it."

Still the hands in his lay passive, and her lashes did

not lift. Possibly the cheek nearest to him grew a shade paler. Her whole body seemed to be listening.

"I have no right, perhaps, to hold your hands thus, — even to speak to you thus," he continued. "Perhaps, in face of this confession, you may think I had no right to ask you to give up your party, and my asking you to do so may seem selfish. It was. But there was so little that I could ask of you in my position, where another man might have asked so much, that I could not give that little up. Do you forgive it? Do you forgive me for asking it for friendship's sake, when I wanted it for love's sake?"

In answer, she inclined her head a little further, and for a moment Kaltenborn gazed silently and raptly upon her square, white brow.

"There is so little that I can ask, even now," he began, but broke off as in desperation at his own helplessness.

"I think I hear some one coming," she murmured softly. "You have hold of my hands."

He released them, and moved toward the hall. "I cannot possibly talk to any one else just now," he explained, hurriedly. But the footfalls turned off into another room, and Kaltenborn halted and glanced back at the statuesque figure. She did not speak, and scarcely looked at him, yet something in her eyes bade him stay. He turned back; but still she said nothing.

"I am laboring under no delusions," continued Kaltenborn, with some reserve, at her prolonged silence. "I can understand the embarrassing position I have placed you in. I am just as much alive as you are to the peculiar conditions under which our friendship has existed, and have never for one moment forgotten the

limitations set by those conditions, — do not forget them now. I know that you and I occupy widely separated spheres in life. I may say that our intimacy has existed on sufferance, and I realize that that sufferance, so far as you are concerned, must now end. I have forfeited it. And even were you willing, in your charity, to continue that sufferance, yet it would be unwise for you to do so, and no kindness to me. And even were that sufferance —”

“*Don't* call it that!” she entreated, with such an undertone of passion that he looked a moment in amazement.

“Even had your friendship been merged into a much deeper feeling,” he continued, “you perhaps would be helpless. The days of shepherds piping their love-songs beneath the windows of princesses have gone by, if, in fact, they ever existed outside of the strained fancies of the poet. Love is not all to-day.”

“It is, for a woman,” she murmured.

A spasm of pain passed over his face, but he continued stoically: “Country ministers’ wives are not recruited from the ranks of people in your social position. A woman in your position is not fitted by religious or social training for the life of a minister’s wife. I don’t suppose you could be happy in such a life — unless you loved your husband very, very much. Nobody knows all this better than I. Therefore I say that I did wrong in coming here after I saw the drift of my affections.”

“Are n’t you too hard on yourself?” she asked, in the same suppressed tone she had been using, looking steadily down.

“I am not hard enough,” he returned, inexorably. “No matter what I might have hoped, no matter what

encouragement you might have given me, I should, in loyalty to my work, have kept away. I should have known that it must end in bitterness. I did know it." He paused a moment, as if reflecting on this bitterness. "Perhaps it is best — I know it is best — for this bitterness to come now. And when I reflect that you gave me no encouragement, that I had no real hope —" Again he broke off with a kind of impatient despair.

Carol still stood with averted eyes, an almost angelic sweetness and patience lighting her face. Kaltenborn looked at the fair picture a moment with longing eyes, and then went on grimly: "Can you imagine yourself working with the people of the Methodist Church here, allied for life to a man living on a salary of nine hundred dollars a year? — your clothes scanned every Sunday, and yourself censured if you put on anything too fine, and your husband told, when he suggests that the quarterage is running behind, that his wife should not indulge in such extravagance? — some of the members refusing to pay their quarterage on the ground that the preacher's wife dresses better than their wives and daughters do, and consequently does n't need the money as much as they do? Could you give up dancing, cards, and theatres, and cut yourself off from most of your old associates?"

"That is not beyond my imagination," she answered, slowly, after a moment. Her eyes lifted, but instantly fell before his gaze.

"Do you mean that you could be happy under such conditions?" he asked, wonderingly.

"I can conceive of compensations that would make such a life, not only tolerable, but attractive." Her lips quivered a little, and Kaltenborn looked at her blankly,

striving to fathom her meaning. Such words seemed truly strange, coming from her.

"What compensations, for instance?" he asked.

"The love of a loyal man," she answered.

Her words seemed to bring vividly before him all that he had lost, and he suddenly exclaimed, with vehemence, "Carol, I am most unhappy. The times and I are out of joint. Everything I touch turns to dust. I am a failure, and no courage, no philosophizing, will disguise the fact any longer. Something is deadly wrong with me. The very hopelessness of my future at this moment makes me physically sick. Even supposing that all I have dreamed of as the acme of happiness were true — suppose you loved me enough to marry me. In what light would your father and mother regard me as a husband? They would scorn the notion. That is what drives me mad with jealousy and shame. I have given up all to be a preacher, to work for the uplifting of the grovellers. Yet were I to-day the manager of my father's brewery, as I once was, and the prospective heir of his money, your own father, whose boy has been degraded so often by that same stuff by which my father has acquired his wealth, would regard me as a more eligible husband for his daughter. You would yourself."

Carol suddenly lifted her head and transfixed him with a look of such unutterable reproach and indignation that he added quickly, —

"I mean that you could more safely marry me — that you would have a surer guarantee of happiness. You would not be transplanted from one sphere of life to another — to one that would be strange to you and cold and constantly wearing. That's what I meant," he added with tender penitence. "What training have you

had for a minister's wife? What sympathy could you have for my work?" He paused, and looked at her intently. "Don't think me harsh. I tell you, soberly, it would break my heart to give you pain. I appreciate all you have been to me. God knows I do — your friendship and all. But that vast gulf between us — that divergence of thought and motive and aim, which began in you long before your birth, and has grown more and more marked ever since — how can you cross that? How can I? I have known it — I knew it when I asked you to become my wife."

"When did you ask me to become your wife?"

She lifted her eyes without shame or fear, as though bidding him to look into her soul. Kaltenborn blinked at her helplessly, blinded by the light of a great revelation. Then her eyes dilated with a sudden fear, and clasping her hands over her shame-flushed face, she cried in anguish: "Oh, Stephen, can't you see that I love you?"

Still he sat speechless and motionless, stunned with the magnitude of his thoughts. After some time — he had no idea what length of time — he walked over to Carol's chair with perfect composure, and laid his hand upon her bowed head.

"Look up, love," he said.

She shook her head, and when he repeated his request, she answered, "Not yet, Stephen."

He dropped down beside her, with a smile, and pulled her hands away. Still she would not let him look into her eyes, and, encircling his neck with her arms, she hid her face upon his shoulder.

When Kaltenborn got back to his lodging, about eleven o'clock, he knocked at the evangelist's door.

That worthy, Kaltenborn knew, was as slow in going to bed as he was in leaving it in the morning, and he was not surprised to find him still up.

"How's your throat?" asked Kaltenborn, almost joyously.

"Better," answered the evangelist, eying Kaltenborn sharply.

"Will you preach to-morrow night?" asked the latter.

"The Lord willing, I shall. What's the racket?"

"I have something to tell you, my brother," said Kaltenborn, with an overflow of fraternalism that made the evangelist prick up his ears still further. "I was out to-night to see that young woman who was to give the theatre party, — Miss Darlington."

"Your landlady insinuated as much to me," said McAndrews, with a grin.

"I may say in confidence," Kaltenborn went on, indifferent now to Mrs. Hicks's flings, "that as a friend of hers I had previously asked her to abandon this party. I am free to confess that I see no particular harm in theatre parties, and that I asked her to give up this one simply that our friendship might not be jeopardized — I have n't time now to go into the details of that. I found to-night that she had decided to give up her party before she knew of the destruction of the opera-house at High Point. In fact, by a rather queer coincidence, she had the letters cancelling her invitations in her hand, and was standing at the post-office door, when the telegram was brought up to her. At dinner you told me that, in view of the burning of the opera-house, you would substitute for the sermon against theatre-going one called 'The Hand of God.' This

sermon, I take it from what you said, treats such events as the destruction of this opera-house as providential interventions in many cases ; and I presume you mean to make a local application in this particular case. Without raising a doctrinal point, I want to ask you, in view of the self-denying and magnanimous conduct of this young woman, not to preach even the 'Hand of God' sermon. It would do Miss Darlington a great injustice, especially as she cannot publicly explain what I have just explained to you. And she would n't do it if she could," he added.

The evangelist, who had listened with the greatest interest, calmly lit a cigar. "Kaltenborn, if your simple request induced that young woman to give up her party," he exclaimed, admiringly, "you ought to go into evangelistic work."

A slight flush showed on Kaltenborn's cheek, and he said, smilingly, "Then you will forego that sermon?"

"Certainly I will, certainly. I'd be a brute if I did n't. She's done her duty, but whether by her God or by you, I'm not clear." He gazed meditatively at the ceiling, taking little, short, highly relishable puffs at his cigar. "I'll have to get up a new sermon for next Saturday night, I guess. Friday night exhausts my repertory. You see, throwing out 'The Fleshpots of Egypt'—that's the theatre sermon,—and 'The Hand of God' both, kind of cuts me short. Still, it strikes me that I've got one shot left in my lockers. Yes! Any Mormon elders been around here lately, proselyting,—say within the last year?"

"None that I know of," answered Kaltenborn, repressing a smile.

"I'm sorry—under the circumstances. One of the

hottest shots I've got is 'Mormonism : the Degradation of Woman, and the Desolation of the Home.' The only trouble with it is you can't blaze away at random. There would n't be much sense, you see, in preaching it here unless you've had a Mormon elder or two with you in the past year or so. It's kind of funny you ain't had, too. I strike their trail in a good many places, and when it ain't too cold, I go after 'em — hot."

CHAPTER XXX

THE SERPENT'S CUNNING

HERBERT DARLINGTON sat in his office looking over some manuscript tariff-sheets which were to go to the printer in the morning. It was night, and the building was so still that he could hear the faint scampering to and fro of a mouse which had recently taken up quarters somewhere in his room. The slight noise disturbed him out of all proportion to its volume ; and, pausing in his work, he fell to thinking of a harassing detective story he had once read when a boy, in which the young Sleuth was cast into an underground vault full of ravenous rats. Bert had reached that point in his retrospection where the young hero was battling with sleep on one hand and the ferocious rodents on the other, when the venturesome mouse went scuttling through the waste-paper basket. The sharp, crackling sound made Bert jump, and in a gust of temper very unusual in him, he kicked the basket across the room.

He turned to the sheets again, but he had no heart for the work. The room seemed cold, though it was a mild summer evening, and the stillness, now that the mouse was frightened into silence, oppressed him. He arose, and for some minutes walked restlessly up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets. It was important that the tariff-sheets should go to the printer

in the morning, yet he finally locked them up unfinished, lighted a cigar, and turned out the lights.

On the outside steps below, he asked himself where he should go. It was just half-past eight. Elsie's parlor naturally came to his mind first, but he as quickly dismissed the thought. Old man Clifford was more than he could tolerate just then, and, somehow, even Elsie did not appeal to him. But conscious of his unjust mood, he tried to picture himself at her door, then in the parlor, then talking with her. It would not do; he knew he would be moody and taciturn and despondent.

There were still left his home and his club. The latter was a little social organization with quarters in the Ashboro Inn. The rooms contained a piano and a billiard table, and here the boys smoked or read or played cards or sang. The membership embraced ten or twelve of Ashboro's most prominent young men; but, in spite of this, it was hinted in many quarters that a great deal of wickedness went on behind the drawn curtains of the club, and it had been denounced from the pulpit of the Methodist Church, before Kaltenborn's time, as a half-way house to hell. These strictures were grossly unjust for the most part, though it is probable that some things did go on at the club which would not bear the broad light of day.

Bert finally decided to go home. But at the gate an unaccountable melancholy took possession of him — a feeling akin to homesickness. The house before him had an unfamiliar, inhospitable air in the starlight, and increased the chilliness which he had felt in the office. He thought that possibly he was going to have a chill, and that the best thing for him to do would be to go to

bed. But toward his own room he felt an especial repugnance, and the idea of going to bed there, just then, was exceedingly disagreeable.

Standing there irresolute, his thoughts again turned to Elsie, and as quickly turned away again. Her home was even more cheerless to his fancy just then than his own. As a last resort, therefore, he decided on the club ; but as he walked aimlessly along, and ran over in his mind those he would be most likely to find there, he was conscious of a sharp antipathy to all of them. He might go up to the Business Men's Club, of which he was also a member, he reflected. He usually found little pleasure in the society of the elderly men who gathered there, but to-night, with the perversity which had fastened upon him, he fancied that it would be rather entertaining to watch these old men playing peneuche, or listen to them discussing politics. He stepped off quite briskly, with a certain cozy sofa in mind on which he could lie back and smoke, and, comparatively unobserved, hear and see all that went on.

After going a block he suddenly stopped. His father would be there — he had heard him say at dinner that he thought he would go up that evening. Just why this fact should influence him, Bert did not know or pause to inquire ; but the thought had given him a sudden distaste for the Business Men's Club also. He swung around, and walked back to the house, yawning disconsolately. Entering his room and snapping on the electric light, he glanced around him, without taking off his hat or sitting down. In spite of its luxurious furnishings, the place was just as cheerless as he had expected to find it.

His books offered no temptation to remain, for he

never read much, and still less on these warm evenings. His Bible — a present from his mother years before — lay on the table. He smiled half-cynically as he recalled the earnestness with which he had searched its pages during his convalescence. He had not opened it now for several weeks, and felt less than ever like doing so at this moment. But in sheer contrariness he did open it, still standing, and glanced idly at a random page. The words were as dead and foreign to him in spirit as though they had been written on another planet, by a race of beings buried and forgotten æons before. He tossed the book down irreverently, and walked out.

There was a light in Carol's room, but he did not go in. In fact, he softened his footfalls somewhat as he passed her door; and when he went out the front door, he closed it with rather less noise than usual.

For an hour or two he roamed the streets in the residence part of the town, with his eyes turned toward the starry heavens. At times he was filled with the most ennobling thoughts, and a strange happiness thrilled him; again he fell into a despondent, self-pitying mood. On the whole, though, he felt much better at ten o'clock, and turned his steps homeward quite cheerfully. But at the gate he felt the same insurmountable repugnance to going to bed, and in a flash he decided to go up to the club, late as it was.

As he walked down the slope, he saw his father and another man under a street-lamp ahead, approaching him. For no reason that he could assign, except that he was in a solitary mood, he crossed the street into the shadow, and passed them unrecognized.

At the club four or five young fellows, Cash Winter

among them, were sitting around a card-table. One of them was idly shuffling a pack of cards; the others were tilted back in their chairs, as though they had finished playing. Bert saluted them briefly, and not very sociably; and, standing a little apart from them, smoked his cigar in momentary silence. His presence seemed to throw a restraint over the others, as though possibly they had been discussing something not meant for his ears. Bert felt this, and was about to move into the other room, when one of the boys said, —

“Bring out your bottle, Jackson. Bert’s no baby. Besides, it ain’t a square deal.”

The young man addressed as Jackson hesitated a moment, and then with evident reluctance took from a little shelf under the table — ordinarily used for chips — several small whiskey-glasses and a squat brown bottle. While he filled the glasses, another member of the company went for water for a “wash.”

“I’ll have one on you, too, Jackson.” It was Bert who spoke. He did not smile, and there was a hardness, almost a defiance, in his voice and eyes.

The company instantly exchanged significant glances, which Bert could not have failed to notice. Jackson, with his hand still on the bottle, flushed slightly, and glanced almost appealingly at the others. Their faces were expressionless. Then Jackson slowly filled another glass.

“Bert, if you drink, I don’t,” said Winter, decidedly, setting his glass down, and looking Darlington squarely in the eye.

Bert grew slightly paler, and did not speak for a moment. Then he said, haughtily, “Very well, I will not interfere with your pleasure,” and stalked out of the room.

As he approached the bright front of a saloon on the street below, — the other fronts were dark, — he was conscious of a temptation to go in. Not to drink, simply to go in. The temptation to drink had passed away. He resolved, though, that he would not even go in ; but after passing the door, he deliberately turned back ; and it was with a peculiar, almost delightful, sensation that he felt himself carried along into the saloon, — without volition, as it were, something like one who falls through space in a dream. He stopped at the cigar-case, however, bought a cigar, lit it, looked around in a slightly bewildered way, and walked out again. When he reached the next corner he was trembling all over, and his forehead was damp with perspiration.

A panic feeling like hysteria was taking possession of him. He felt what he had never felt before. The horrible feeling was on him, like some nightmare, that he was going to take a drink, and was going to get drunk. In the grip of this terrible sensation, he felt as helpless as a maniac in his frenzy. In his terror, his wits fled ; his blood seemed turned to ice-water, and a deadly coldness settled around his heart. He felt as if he was going to faint, and a moment later his knees did in fact give way, and he sank gently to the sidewalk, just as one of the young fellows he had left in the club came up. He looked sharply down at Bert in the darkness, and then, as if assured that nothing much was wrong, he asked :

“What’s the matter, old man?”

The other’s voice and presence stimulated Bert immediately. “Dropped my knife,” he mumbled, and to gain time made a pretence of groping over the dark pavement. The other was about to strike a match when Bert added, “Never mind ! I’ve got it.” By a supreme effort, he raised himself to his feet.

The other was in a sociable mood, — perhaps he felt a little contrite over the recent scene in the club rooms, — and he stood and talked for ten minutes. Those minutes were as so many hours of torture to Herbert. He heard a voice a long way off, talking of things that he knew nothing about, but which he was conscious he ought to know something about. He answered as best he could, though, and his companion seemed to discover nothing amiss. After a little Bert's faculties cleared, and when his companion finally moved away, he was almost sorry.

He grasped his cane tightly, and walked swiftly up the slope toward his home. But he did not stop there, or even pause. He kept on, until he reached Mrs. Hicks's cottage. He stood on the steps some time before he rang the bell, though, and once he half turned away; but immediately feeling a return of that miserable, lost, helpless sensation, he eagerly and desperately seized the knob of the old-fashioned bell. After some delay, Mrs. Hicks cautiously opened the door a few inches. Bert asked for Kaltenborn with what he felt to be cowardly eagerness, but he was almost shameless now. He stiffened in terror when the old lady told him that Kaltenborn was over at Brandywine, attending an Epworth League convention, and would not be back for two days. Then recognizing Bert, she opened the door a little further, and asked him if any one was sick.

Bert did not answer. For a moment he felt like throwing himself at the old woman's feet, and begging her to save him. But even under the scourge of his dread terror, his pride balked at this humiliation, and he abruptly turned away into the darkness without another word.

Brandywine was on the H. P., R., A., and S. railroad,

and for a moment Bert entertained a wild idea of going down to the round-house, ordering an engine fired up, and being taken to Kaltenborn. But again his pride balked, — he felt a little better now, — and he walked swiftly toward Elsie Clifford's home. To his inexpressible joy, there was a light in her room, which was in the front of the house, over the parlor. Dismissing his first idea of ringing, he tiptoed up into the stoop, from the side of which he could command a view of Elsie's window. Claspings the post tightly in his arms, he gazed up at the illuminated curtain, as he might have gazed at the rock of salvation, his lips parted, his eyes glistening with a piteous intensity, his fine face rapt with reverence and awe.

He had held this fixed position for some time when the shadow of a figure fell across the curtain, lingered an instant, and disappeared.

"Dear little girl! dear little girl! dear little Elsie!" he whispered, with transcendent solemnity. "I am not afraid. I can fight it out. I'll be brave. I won't give up. I'll do it for your sake, sweet one. I love you, darling. I love you so much. I will always love you. I will die for you. I will be brave for you. I am not afraid, am I, dear one? You won't let me fall, will you? Pray for me, love, and God will help me for your sake. I can't be bad as long as you love me. No, no, sweet little girl, dear little girl, pride of my life, salvation of the world!"

As he clung to that hard, insensate post, minute after minute, peace came to his storm-tossed soul. Somebody went by, whistling, on the other side of the street. Bert listened as attentively as though it were the enthralling strains of an angel band. Then he smiled, — a happy,

joyous smile. Ah, it was so good to live ! So good to breathe the cool night air ! So good to look up at the stars ! So good to smell the first early flowers ! He wondered who it could be that whistled so merrily. Whoever it was must be very happy. He wondered if the person had ever drunk, or if his father ever had, or his grandfather. Probably not, or he would not be so happy, he thought, with a momentary pang. But the pain instantly passed. Most people were happy. Many parents and grandparents had drunk, and yet their sons and grandsons had saved themselves. *He* had, for one.

He slipped out into the street again, like a strong man ready for the race. What a glorious thing to be a man ! To be able to overcome by will-power alone the miserable, degrading weaknesses of the body ! And to know that one had overcome them ! His exultation was almost painful, for in that moment he was convinced that he had exorcised forever the demon which had afflicted him so sorely and so long. He held his head high ; he walked with a springy step ; he twirled his cane jauntily ; he carolled snatches of song.

Could a hunchbacked, shrivelled, crooked-limbed dwarf be magically made over while he slept into a fair-faced, strong, clean-limbed man, his joy and amazement over his metamorphosis could scarcely be greater than were young Darlington's over his own metamorphosis. He felt like one emerging from the pitchy blackness and horrid cries of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, out into the glorious sunlight of God, with warmth and life and singing birds and nodding flowers all around. A new era in his life had begun. He was now like other men. He could do as they did. So confident was he, in the plenitude of this new and amazing strength, that

he felt he could even take one drink, had he wanted it, and then easily stop there. True, he had felt so in the past, and had been deceived ; but there was something vastly different in his present confidence.

After a little, he felt a desire to prove that difference, not only for his own satisfaction, but for the satisfaction of those who might happen to see him drink. Something within him warned him, even now, not to try this. But as he felt not the slightest craving for liquor, and as this prudent thought wounded his new pride, and chilled his ardor, he impatiently shook it off.

CHAPTER XXXI

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

BERT deliberately walked down-town again. The saloons were ostensibly closed at this hour, but he had no difficulty in effecting an entrance. The bar-tender, though, after seeing who it was that he had admitted, looked anything but pleased, and reluctantly went back to his place behind the bar. No other customers were present, but the click of billiard-balls and the sound of tipsy levity came from a back room.

"I'll take a little whiskey, please," said Bert, in a clear, firm tone. When the liquor was set out, he steadily poured the glass half full, looked the bar-tender squarely in the eye, as he lifted the draught to his lips, and then drank it down. As he set the glass back, a burst of rude laughter came from the other room.

"It is too bad that some people have to abuse whiskey," observed Bert, quietly, taking an easy position against the bar. The bar-tender seemed inclined to take this sentiment, coming from a man of Darlington's notorious reputation, as a joke. But something in the young fellow's face restrained the bar-tender's knowing smile, and he gave Bert a searching, puzzled second glance.

"It takes all kinds of people, Mr. Darl'n'ton, to make a world," he answered, conservatively, as he rinsed the glasses.

"The world could very profitably dispense with that kind," returned Bert, pointedly. He stood and smoked in silence for a moment. "I believe I'll have another one," he added, in the same quiet tone.

The bar-tender set the bottle and glasses out again with evident reluctance, and glanced half-involuntarily into the back room, as though he were calculating on what assistance he might receive from that quarter in case young Darlington had one of his dreaded "spells," with which the bar-tender was only too well acquainted.

Bert did not fail to notice the other's reluctance, and he said graciously, pausing with the brown bottle in his hand, "You fellows have been a little bit afraid of me in the past, have n't you?"

"Well, I guess we have," said the other, with a sycophantic grin. "You're pretty bad when you get started."

"I'll never get started again," said Bert, impressively, as he tossed off the liquor. "That's all in the past. I have been cured."

The bar-tender received this statement with a rather dubious countenance at first. But the man before him was so plainly sober that he asked, finally, "Gold cure?"

"No, no, nothing like that," answered Bert, quickly. "Something infinitely better."

"I never had much faith in that gold cure," observed the vender. "I've seen too many relapses."

"Any purely physical cure is bound to end in a relapse," said Bert, loftily. "My cure was nothing of that kind. I am hardly at liberty to say just what it was. I discovered it myself, though. Or, rather, it came to me.

I may say that I consider it as a pure and simple gift of God's."

The bar-tender's dubious air returned, and he furtively scrutinized his customer's face again for any evidence of earlier potations that evening. "Still, a man's got to be careful after takin' any cure," he observed, practically.

A shadowy smile flitted over Bert's classic features, half amused, half sarcastic. Evidently he had not missed the animus of the other's remark. He did not answer, but when he shortly said, "I guess I'll take one more and then go home," it was with the manner of flouting the other's admonition.

The bar-tender, now that the prospect of a speedy riddance of his dangerous customer was in sight, set the liquor out with greater alacrity this time. Still, Bert showed no disposition to go after this drink, but stood gazing intently at a piece of terra cotta statuary representing an old Knickerbocker, which stood on the end of the bar. The vender waited patiently several minutes, and then said with a forced yawn, "Well, I guess I'll close up," and turned to his cash register to make up his cash.

"Give me another drink," said Bert, without turning his head; and there was something so peremptory in his tone that the bar-tender, with his knowledge of Bert's nature when in liquor, dared not refuse.

After serving the drink, he turned to his cash again, at which he worked with unusual expedition, at the same time bawling to the occupants of the back room to hurry up and finish their game, as he wanted to lock up. Before he was through, though, another request for a drink came from Bert. The bar-tender paused in

his work, with his broad back toward his customer. He could see Bert's reflection in the mirror. As yet the young man showed no marked evidence of intoxication. He stood erect, and spoke with no thickness or uncertainty. But his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes very bright and slightly vacant.

"Ain't you had about enough?" asked the bartender, harshly.

"I beg your pardon," said Bert, with ultra politeness, at the same time leaning over the bar, as if to indicate that he had not heard.

"I said I thought you 'd had about enough," repeated the bar-tender, not so boldly as before.

"I beg your pardon," said Bert again. It would have been a very dull man indeed that could have missed the significance of Darlington's expression and tone this time. The bar-tender backed down, and said, with forced geniality, —

"Have one on me, Bert, and then go home."

"I drink only at the expense of my friends," answered Bert, haughtily, throwing down a silver dollar.

After swallowing the dram, he again began to study the terra cotta figure. The vender watched him nervously, and though nearly twice the weight of the slim young fellow, he again glanced out into the back room. Suddenly, without the least warning, Bert lifted his cane and smashed the image into a thousand pieces. He then resumed his easy posture without vouchsafing the astounded and indignant bar-tender so much as a glance.

"What's that for?" the other demanded, threateningly, but his bravado rang false.

"I did n't like the way it looked at me," answered Darlington, gravely. "Its eyes looked at me with a

steadiness verging upon impoliteness. They seemed to insinuate that I am drunk. They winked, as if to say, 'Behold the man !' They rolled, and grew large and small, and looked as cold as a fish's. They bulged and stared and looked as though they were afraid of me. In fact, bar-tender," he suddenly exclaimed, swinging about and facing the other with a satanic glitter in his eyes, "they looked a good deal as yours look now !"

The bar-tender tried to laugh it off, but his lips stiffened with terror. The image that faced him so threateningly was in fact appalling, for Bert was fast lapsing into what may be called a second consciousness. The gentle, manly youth was making way for the bestial, homicidal fiend. The amiable mouth drooped cruelly and the tender gray eyes of an hour before gave no more promise of mercy now than those of a famishing tigress.

The bar-tender, after a moment's hesitation, seized a beer mallet, and began to back away. Bert vaulted lightly over the bar and grasped a lemon-knife, brandished it high in the air, and sprang forward. The other fled with a cry of terror. Bert did not pursue him, but the flying man did not pause until he had escaped through the back door. The loafers in the billiard-room quickly followed him, with a sobriety and prudence which one would hardly have credited them with a moment before.

The maniacal fury which followed in the unfortunate youth, resulting in the almost complete destruction of the furnishings of the saloon, is not to be described. From that time Bert remembered nothing clearly. Events came and went like a dream. The dark street in which he soon found himself, gave way after a little to the glare of some lighted room. He saw dark

figures advance and recede, and was vaguely conscious that they were inflicting pain of some kind upon him. But he didn't mind the pain much, and, retaliating, the dark figures were soon all dispersed and he was alone again.

When he next became conscious, he heard the click of wheels beneath him, and recognized the swaying motion of a railroad coach. When the train seemed to stop longer than usual he got off, — he had no idea how or where. It was night again, he took it, for he saw a long line of lights stretching away ahead of him. He asked somebody on the street what town it was. The person only laughed at him. Bert struck at him, there was a sound of rapidly retreating footsteps, and he was again alone.

He wanted whiskey again now. When he finally found his way into a saloon, and ordered a drink, the bar-tender asked him to show his money first. Bert quietly laid down a handful of bills and silver on the bar — all the money he had. The man picked out a bill and handed him back some change. Bert knew he was being robbed; still he said nothing, but sat down in a chair and instantly fell asleep.

He awoke with his own name sounding in his ears. The room was full of fog, apparently, and through the fog dark shapes passed to and fro. These shapes were men, he knew, and they were after him, he conceived. Tottering toward an open door, he crept down a flight of steps on hands and knees. It was damp and cold at the bottom, like a cellar, and he hid himself behind some barrels.

His next consciousness found him aboard another train. This mystified him considerably, but he was

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too stupid yet to attempt any reasoning. For some time he watched the landscape flying by, though it was only a dark, blurred mass to him. As he thus leaned heavily against the window-ledge, he became conscious of some hard object pressing against his side. Investigating, he discovered a pint flask in his pocket, containing a few spoonfuls of whiskey. The sight of the stuff nauseated him, but he knew its value as a stimulant, and he forced it down his throat. For a moment it made him very sick, and then his pulse began to strengthen, and he was soon able to take note of the faces around him. Finally, a young brakeman came through the car, and, stopping at Bert's seat, asked him how he felt.

"What day is this?" asked Bert, weakly, without answering.

"This is Friday," answered the other.

A spasm of pain passed over Bert's face, but he merely said, "Thank you," and turned to the window again. He had been out since Tuesday night.

He ran his hand over his face. It was covered with a three days' stubble. The movement revealed to him, further, that his hands were as grimy as a coal-heaver's, and were badly cut and bruised. He noticed, too, that his diamond ring was gone. He next glanced down at his clothes. A tramp's could hardly have been more disreputable, for he was literally in rags. He felt for his watch only to find that also gone, and he remembered that it was the third watch he had thus lost since his twentieth birthday.

When the brakeman next came through the car, Bert halted him. "Where is my father?" he asked in haggard tones.

"He'll be at the depot with a carriage when we get to Ashboro. The conductor telegraphed to him at Rankelman that we had you. Your father was out on the line lookin' for you yesterday and the day before," he added, familiarly.

At that moment a gentleman passed through the car with whom Bert was well acquainted. He looked squarely at Bert, but did not speak.

"Why did n't he speak to me?" asked Bert, simply.

"I don't suppose he knowed you," answered the brakeman, with a laugh. "Mighty few would in that rig. That headpiece you're wearin' don't look just right on you."

Bert languidly lifted the "headpiece" in question, and found it to be a conductor's old cap. He gazed at it with perfect gravity for a moment, without speaking, and then put it on again.

The train reached Ashboro a few minutes after dusk. As it rolled at reduced speed through the freight yard, a dusky figure swung off the platform-steps of one of the coaches. For a moment it reeled and almost fell. It was Bert Darlington. The shame of getting off at the station, before a curious throng, was more than he could bear.

He sat down on a tie to recover his strength. This part of the yard was sometimes used by the residents of the east side as a short cut to the stores, and a moment later Bert saw a young woman crossing the tracks toward him. It was not until she was within ten feet of him that he recognized Ethel Dane, Carol's dearest girl friend. He lowered his head so that she might not recognize him. As the young woman came up she gave the doubled-up figure a half-frightened glance, such as she would have given a tramp, gathered her skirts in her

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hand, as if to escape contamination, and avoided him by six or seven feet, although he sat just on the edge of the path. But after passing him, she slackened her speed, stopped, and turned and looked back. In a moment she approached him again.

"Are you sick, sir?" she asked, timidly. "Because if you are, we have rooms here that you can go to."

For a moment Bert was tempted to shake his head and let her go on undeceived. But it was too degrading, and lifting his head, he took off his cap. Even then she did not recognize him until he said, sadly, "Don't you know me, Ethel?"

For a moment she stared at him with a blanched face and horrified eyes. Then, bursting into tears, she sobbed, "Poor little Carol!"

Bert watched her with dull, tired eyes, as though her grief were utterly alien to him; but finally he said, simply and sweetly, "Don't cry, Ethel."

"Are you going home?" she asked, wiping her eyes.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then I'll go and tell your father. He's at the station. I'll have him drive down here for you."

It was not more than half an hour later before little knots of people were gathered here and there on the main street. There was one knot in front of Tompkins's drug-store; another at the foot of the stairs leading up to Dr. Still's office; and another in front of the undertaking establishment of Marmaduke Hundreth. There was a hurried crossing of the street, first this way and then that, without much regard to the cross-walks. Clerks, bareheaded and in their shirt-sleeves, formed

smaller knots of twos or threes in front of their respective places of business.

A lady in a buggy drove up to the curb near the little crowd at old man Hundreth's, and instantly some one hurried over to her and imparted some startling intelligence, for she gave a sharp exclamation, and dropped one of her lines. A trio of girls paused curiously and wistfully near the drug-store, upon which a young man immediately detached himself from the group and stepped up to the girls, and began a hurried recital. The girls' soft eyes grew round and sober. A little later, in the residence portions of the town, women might have been seen in animated conversation over backyard fences, or hastening, bare-headed, to the next-door neighbor's.

Herbert Darlington had been killed in the yards by a switch engine.

CHAPTER XXXII

AFTERMATH

THERE are some human events which burst upon a small community with cataclysmic violence ; which for a brief instant derange the social machine, give pause to the course of trade and industry, and even momentarily distract the votaries at the shrine of Mammon. Such an event was Herbert Darlington's tragic death. The prominence of his family, his responsible position in the railroad, his peculiar weakness, and his unfailing kindness and amiability, all lent force to a blow that would have been stunning under any circumstances. On that fatal night there was perhaps not one home, high or low, in Ashboro, which was not affected by the sad event. In many homes he was sincerely mourned, either as friend or benefactor ; in others, he was pitied ; and in still others, he was held up as an impressive example of the vanity of life and the destructiveness of strong drink.

On the afternoon of his funeral the village was wrapped in an almost Sunday quietude. Most of the stores were closed for an hour or two, at least. The railroad shops were shut down for the day ; the general offices were closed from morning till night, with the exception of the train-despatcher's office, where it was necessary to retain a few telegraph operators. A special train was run the length of the road to give such of the employés as wanted

to do so an opportunity to attend the funeral, and the coaches came into Ashboro loaded to the platforms. The Episcopal Church could not hold a quarter of the crowd which gathered there. The *Intelligencer* of the following week is authority for the statement that the funeral train was nearly twice the largest in the history of Ashboro.

Resolutions of regret and sympathy were passed by Bert's club, and by the Business Men's Club, and by the Ladies' Union Aid Society, of which Mrs. Darlington was a member. Several social events set for the week following Bert's death were postponed, — even a dance which was to have been given by a benefit association with which Bert had had no affiliation whatever, and with few of whose members he had had even the slightest acquaintance.

Public sentiment at first flamed so high against the traffickers in liquor that it was hardly safe for one of them to be seen outside of his place of business ; an incendiary attempt was made against one of the most pestiferous grog-shops ; and the temperance party confidently predicted the annihilation of the license party at the next local election. But waves of sentiment, like waves of water, seek a level as soon as the disturbing force is removed. At the polls, only four months later, the prohibition party showed no marked gains ; and all the liquor licenses were renewed the following spring by the Common Council.

It is undeniable that if a man of only mediocre ability, or less, will but enslave himself to drink, he will find many ready to proclaim him a wasted genius. Many who professed to see in Herbert Darlington the superior of his father in business sagacity, predicted that it would be a long time before the traffic department of the H. P., R.,

A., and S. recovered from the loss of its official head. Yet affairs in that department seemed to go on about as before, and the former chief clerk — a young man in whom nobody, with the possible exception of Charles Darlington, had discovered any special ability before — seemed to fill Bert's place very satisfactorily.

In still another matter did excited public opinion go astray. Elsie Clifford, who was frequently spoken of as a bundle of nerves, was confidently expected to be prostrated by Herbert Darlington's sudden death. Many believed that her reason would be affected, — she was always so quick and impulsive, — and a few quietly expressed the opinion that she would not long survive her affianced. Yet, when she was first seen down-town again, a week after Bert's death, she betrayed no evidence of a dissolution of either mind or body. She was a little pale, to be sure, and unusually grave; but when she bent over young Mrs. Wickwire's baby-carriage, and kissed the little inmate, she smiled brightly, and seemed happy. Mrs. Wickwire told afterward that there were tears in Elsie's eyes. Very probably there were, too.

Death is not the cruelest thing in the world. It atones for many sins; and though the dead may soon be half-forgotten by all but a few, it is by foes as well as by friends. The grave is a sanctuary in which all but the foulest may find a refuge. The saloons still ran, the traffic department moved along without a jolt, Elsie Clifford found a solace for her grief; but Herbert Darlington by no means died in vain. After he had been laid away, few thought of him except in connection with his virtues, — his love for his sisters and mother, his gentle amiability, his unassailable integrity, and his winning lack of self-consciousness. Even his one great,

notorious weakness was consigned by most people to that limbo of things better forgotten ; and now that the poor body which had been the helpless instrument of that ungovernable passion was so still and cold, people were prone to soften and smooth over in their minds the ravages which that passion had wrought. Many who had looked upon his sprees — if they may be so called — as mere indulgences, now came over to the more charitable and juster view that he was a victim of heredity.

Herbert's death was a blow to his mother from which she never fully recovered. To take a child from a woman of her age is to lop a great branch from a full-grown tree. Nature refuses to replace the loss. Yet the rest of the tree will leaf and blossom as before, and sometimes with even greater vigor. Mrs. Darlington, though stunned, accepted her trial with Christian fortitude. Of all the children, Bert had been the nearest to her in disposition, as Carol was the nearest to her father. She had sometimes fancied that if Carol had been a boy and Bert a girl, the family would have been better balanced. But it was only a passing fancy, and she would not have had them changed if she could ; for Herbert was gentle without being effeminate, and Carol was daring and courageous without being masculine. The mother was equally proud of the son's gentleness and the daughter's sturdiness.

After Bert was gone, after Mrs. Darlington had accepted the inevitable and had begun to adjust herself to the changed conditions, she told herself that she would sooner have him dead than a confirmed drunkard. Sometimes she told the family this, as they sat around in a little group, so woefully reduced by the absence of only

one. Darlington always silently acquiesced in this sentiment ; but it was some time before Carol could listen to it without an aching throat and a hardened heart, and a desire to exclaim bitterly that there was no need for her brother to be either dead or a drunkard.

A son is perhaps more than a brother, but Carol was shaken more by Herbert's death than her mother was. Mrs. Darlington accepted the inevitable ; Carol rebelled against it. She wanted to argue it out with God — as though it were not yet too late. Yet she said nothing in the family circle. Her father was the only one there to whom she could have thus talked, and she had it not in her heart to add anything to his dumb grief.

The scales had fallen in part from his eyes. A man may no more change his nature than a leopard may change his spots ; and Charles Darlington was the same man, yet under new conditions. His son's death produced permanently the same change in his relations with his wife that Bert's falls used to produce temporarily. The father pitied the mother. His grief was largely sympathy with her. A change took place in his attitude toward her. To be sure, he read the papers at night as usual, and smoked the same number of cigars, and talked almost as little as before with Mrs. Darlington, — which was little enough. But for months after their common bereavement, he would occasionally lower his paper in a stealthy way, and study the subdued, patient face across the table from him, — the wife of his young manhood.

Somehow that young manhood did not seem so far away now as it once had. He could remember just how Winifred had looked the night Bert was born, and it had seemed to him then, even in the hour of his joy over her

safety, that God had placed an awful burden on frail shoulders. It seemed so to him yet, in these moments of reverie; and the figure across the table also seemed yet the simple, delicately nurtured girl who had smiled so wanly up at him from her pillow of pain, twenty-six years before. Very often, at this point in his reverie, his tears would blur the letters on the page before him.

Yet, like many another man, — more 's the pity, — he was almost awkward in the expression of this feeling. Had he knelt beside his wife, and poured out his love and sympathy and reverence for her with boyish impetuosity, he knew that it would have been balm to her heart, and that she would never have doubted his sincerity, or thought such demonstration unmanly. But he could not do it, any more than he could have flown, though he despised the pride or sensitiveness or coldness or whatever it was which kept him from doing it. Instead, he would pave the way for his affectionate demonstrations with some commonplace remark; or, when he happened to pass behind Mrs. Darlington's chair, — sometimes by design, — he would pause and pat her cheek and ask her what she was reading. When she had taken his hands in her own, — as she never failed to do, — and had pressed them to her cheek, and he had bent and kissed her lips, — almost as full and red as in her bridal days, — he would feel a lightness of heart that was almost giddiness.

Sometimes, as he brooded in the office, it seemed to him that he had starved his wife's heart all the days of their wedded life. He knew that he was not a demonstrative man, and he sometimes doubted that he was even affectionate. He knew — at least believed — that other men gave more of their hearts to their wives than

he had given to his wife. This remorse was softened, though, by the thought that he had never been intentionally unkind to her; that he had given her few sharp words, and that he had provided well for her with this world's goods. He was glad to think, too, that her children had been a joy to her, on the whole, and that her affections had found an ample outlet in them, if not in him.

But in spite of these consoling thoughts, there were hours when he felt like leaving the office, and going home and taking Winifred in his arms, and telling her how much he loved her, and how much he regretted his coldness in the past. These moods did not come every day, or every week, and he never followed out these impulses; but the change of which they were a manifestation made itself felt in the home every day and every hour of every day. Thus, again, Bert had not died in vain.

Carol, though, hardened her heart for a while. When Kaltenborn called at the house the day after the funeral, he found her pale and serious. He took both her hands in his, and for a moment they looked into each other's eyes — he as if he would search out all the pain and trouble in the breast below, she as if she would tell him all the pain and trouble there. Then he pressed her to his bosom, and laying his cheek tenderly upon her pale hair, he murmured, "Tell me all about it, love!"

She began to sob, for almost the first time since receiving the terrible news, which had struck her into a kind of stupor. When she had composed herself somewhat, she said, tremulously, —

"I don't blame God — now. I am not unjust enough to think that God would strike that poor boy down simply

to punish him for drinking, when he was no more responsible for it than you or I. And if he was to keep on drinking, I — I don't know but that it was a mercy for him to be taken away. I have got that far," she continued, with a little affectionate smile. "And if he had to die that the terrible appetite might die too, I can see where it was just. If he died for that, because of God's law, I cannot complain, for I do not expect God to annul his laws for me or my loved ones. But—" She gave way to her grief again, and exclaimed, with an uncontrollable sob, as she laid her head back again on his breast, "Oh, Stephen, something terrible was wrong somewhere. He was so young and innocent!"

"Something *was* wrong, Carol," answered Kaltenborn. "In this case the wrong began with Bert's grandfather, or possibly still further back." He paused to arrange his thoughts, when she asked, rebelliously, —

"Do you see any mercy in that, — to punish him for the sins of another?"

"God is not merciful in the sense we use the word," he said. "His penalties are as immutable as his laws. He does not pardon sins. No man was ever yet pardoned for breaking one of God's laws, and no man ever will be. We human beings occasionally pardon the violators of human law. But that is only because we know those laws are not perfect, and guilt is not always established beyond doubt. God's laws are not only perfect, but beneficent; through obedience to them man is destined to reach his highest glory, and only through obedience. Why, then, should he be pardoned for disobedience? Would not the very act of pardoning be unjust? Would it not leave the violator headed the wrong way, — in the wrong path?"

"What do people mean, then, when they speak of God's mercy?" she asked, in a calmer tone.

"Usually something they know nothing about, and which does not exist. Mercy was first attributed to God because men first attributed a wrath to him which he does not possess. As I just said, God's mercy, to my mind, lies in the very fact that he never pardons. For if the operation of his law, — and the law includes the penalty — is beneficent, any pardoning, — that is, any annulling of the law, — would be a diminution of that beneficence. Is that not clear? Your brother is dead. Though killed by a locomotive, he died in all probability because of an appetite which he inherited. Suppose God had pardoned the breaking of the law in this case; that is, had taken away the weakness and bewilderment which betrayed Bert to his death; in short, had let Bert live. That would have been simply a multiplication of miseries. Bert would probably have married. What he inherited he would probably have transmitted to his children. Suppose he had had two sons, both drunkards, and four grandsons, and so on and on, until a strain of drunkards was abroad in the land. That is not a fanciful picture. The thing has happened, not only in the case of drunkards but in that of criminals. I can point you to a case where a single pair of criminals have infested one of our States with their offspring to the number of a thousand or more."

"Why did God let *that* happen?" she asked.

Her acuteness thrilled him with pride, and he pressed her a little closer. "There are cases of apparent escape from the penalties of broken law, I will admit," he answered, thoughtfully. "But it is only apparent. The penalty is simply different. It must be paid in the end."

"And often by innocent people," she said, bitterly. "Why did n't God take away my grandfather? *He* was the sinner."

"Perhaps he had work for your grandfather. Perhaps he was looking ahead to *you*, and he could not have had you without your grandfather."

"I don't know what he wanted me for," she murmured.

"You may be sure it was for something," he answered, earnestly. "Maybe it was to soothe and cheer me through life, and make me stronger and better, and more able to do the work I have set out to do," he added, softly.

The eyes which looked up into his lit with a wonderful radiance, and then as quickly filled with tears. "I am not worthy, Stephen!" she whispered.

"I think you are," he answered, gravely. "And you have confidence in my judgment, have n't you?"

She answered by pressing closer.

"If you are weak yet in any respect," he continued, "it is only because you have not yet come into your full strength. I want you to be a great woman. I expect you to be. Not one whose name is in the mouth of the people, but one whose greatness is known to herself and to those she loves. I want you to fulfil your destiny."

"Poor little Bert fulfilled his!" she exclaimed, with quivering, smarting nostrils. She added, quickly, "Oh, Stephen, if you only knew how hard and wicked I felt when I stood beside his casket, and everybody thought my heart was melting with tenderness! He looked so sweet, as though he were asleep; and his face was so bruised where they—where they had struck him that I—" She paused an instant. "Stephen, I said I

should n't care if every girl's brother in the world were dead."

"But you would have cared," he said, gently.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, with a shudder, "because when I saw a little dead bird in the cemetery, my heart ached for its mother."

"That heart-ache is one of the treasures laid up to our dead brother's memory," said Kaltenborn, sweetly.

"Let there be more. Let him not have died in vain."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE PATERNAL HEART

SOMETHING like three weeks after Herbert's funeral, Stephen Kaltenborn ascended the stairs of the railroad's general offices ; but instead of going into Carol's room, as was his wont, he turned and went into the president's office. He preferred a request to that official to which the latter listened very quietly, but with possibly the least uneasiness. He was tilted back in his swivel-chair, and he did not look Kaltenborn in the face, but kept his eyes upon his desk, and chewed a little on his cigar. When Kaltenborn was done, the president was silent for perhaps half a minute, his brown eyes dancing in a way that betrayed his emotion.

"I don't hesitate to say, Mr. Kaltenborn, that this is something of a surprise to me," he answered, candidly ; "and yet I have often thought that it might come to pass. You have been very frank with me, and I will be equally so with you. I hoped that it would not come to pass. I believe you will make Carol a good husband, and, other things being equal, I don't know of any man in the world that I'd sooner trust her to. All that I am afraid of is that it may be too great a change for her, and that she may be unhappy on that account."

He paused, and for a moment stared hard out of the window. If Kaltenborn had ever entertained any doubts

of Charles Darlington's tenderness for his daughter, they were swept away in that moment.

"But if you have spoken to Carol, and she has given her consent, I have n't a word to say. Carol has practically been her own master since she was eighteen years old, and I don't know that I have ever had to overrule her. I certainly won't begin now. If she loves you, you are the man we want her to marry. And if she has promised to marry you, she knows what she is doing. I say that to remove any doubts you yourself may have as to the wisdom of this step. There was a time when I thought Carol would never marry; and though I should have urged her to do so, I guess we should never have picked out a preacher for her." His eyes lit with a gentle pleasantry. "But she has changed a good deal in the past year. I don't know but you have changed her. Anyway, I guess it's for the best. Her mother is pretty sure that it is. You are getting a wife, Mr. Kaltenborn, that you can be proud of anywhere. If she should not happen to take to the new work right in the beginning, all I ask of you is to remember that it *is* new. She'll adapt herself to it in time, because she is a girl who can adapt herself to anything. I congratulate you, sir, on the woman you are getting." He extended his shapely white hand with the courtly manner which sat upon him so naturally.

They talked for nearly an hour. Darlington finally asked Kaltenborn if he expected to move in the fall. Kaltenborn noticed that he approached the question with some hesitancy. He answered that he did not know, but rather thought he would.

"If you do, is it your and Carol's idea to get married first?" asked the president, with a slight huskiness.

"It was," answered Kaltenborn, "but Herbert's death has changed the situation."

"Don't let it," said Darlington, earnestly. "Much as I hate to see the child go, it's her duty to be with you. Don't let public sentiment dictate in a matter of this kind. If you and Carol feel that you ought to marry before you go — and I think you ought — I want you to do it. This thing of considering a marriage as a festivity which jars upon the memory of the dead, is grotesque and abominable. Marriage is the sacreddest and solemnest act of a man's life, and the ceremony might be performed in the chamber of the dead without incongruity. If you want to marry before you go, Mr. Kaltenborn, if you and Carol feel as though you ought to, — I want you to do it."

After the minister had gone, the president sat almost motionless in his chair for a long time. Then he turned to his desk and tried to work ; but it was impossible. After tramping up and down his room for several minutes, with his hands in his pockets, he strolled abstractedly into the traffic-manager's office. The former chief clerk looked up inquiringly. Darlington gave a slight start, murmured something unintelligible, and hastily turned away.

As he re-entered his own room, his eye was caught by a fancy calendar illustrated with a picture of Miles Standish's courtship. For six months and more he had consulted the dates on that calendar without especially noticing the picture ; but to-day he stood before it a long time, with his hands in his pockets, studying Priscilla's face. It was very strange, he thought, that the hushed joy, the sweet humility, which illuminated those delicate features had never impressed him before.

He had read the poem, he supposed, in his younger days, but it had all but slipped away from him. He wondered now, whimsically, if Miles Standish ever did any preaching. Most all those old fellows either did preach or could preach, as he remembered his history. He wondered, too, if Standish had been poor. He thought perhaps he had, and he suddenly leaned forward and kissed the face of a girl who was not afraid to marry a poor man.

He recovered himself with a kind of guilty start, as though his act was too sentimental for a man. Carol had given him that calendar, and had hung it with her own hands. That was only seven months or less before, but for some reason it seemed in the remote past — away back in Carol's girlhood days. She had laughed and said, — he remembered it so plainly, — "Papa, here's a new sweetheart for you ; only, another fellow has spoken first !" And now another "fellow" had spoken for *her* ! He felt, momentarily, that he was going to lose her almost as hopelessly as he had lost his son ; and at the thought of Kaltenborn's probable early departure from Ashboro, tears filled his eyes. He let them stand until they had melted away, and then he walked down the hall to Carol's room.

He whistled a little as he entered the door, for he suspected that he was looking unduly solemn. He strolled around the room, talking at random, and aimlessly working in and out the drawers of the file-case. He looked at Carol to see if any marked change had come over her. He thought it must have been so, but he could see no change. She looked as innocent and unsuspecting as a dove ; hot as it was, there was a refreshing airiness and placidity about her ; her eye was

clear and tranquil, and her cheek as white and cool as though it had never flushed under a lover's kiss. The sleeves of her shirt-waist were pushed half-way up her forearm for the sake of comfort as she wrote ; and somehow this arrangement gave her a domestic appearance, as though she were forestalling her future state.

"Carol, Kaltenborn was just in to see me," said Darlington, abruptly turning upon her. Her cool, white cheek did not turn, and she asked tranquilly, —

"What did *he* want?"

"He wanted you," he answered.

She flushed a little now, but without dropping her eyes she asked, soberly, "What did you tell him, papa?"

"I saw at once that it was a cut-and-dried affair, so I did n't commit myself," he answered, with a twinkle.

Carol dropped her eyes with a thoughtful, musing smile, understanding her father well enough. After a little she said, with a happy, arch glance, "You have n't congratulated me yet."

"I congratulated him," he retorted.

"And you won't me?" she said, putting on a little injured look.

He came over to her side, took her hand, and bent over and laid his lips to hers. When he lifted his head there was an added brightness in Carol's eyes.

"Papa, dear!" she exclaimed, clinging to his hand, "are you very, very disappointed?"

Darlington sat down and crossed his legs. "It would n't be honest, Carol, for me to say that I am entirely satisfied. I had hoped for a different life for you. I don't know just what, but something different. But I suppose I should have been disappointed — a little —

no matter whom you married. I know there is no young man in this town that I should care to see you marry, leaving Kaltenborn out of the count. But with your education and talents, I looked for a different career for you than that of a minister's wife. Perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps I was too ambitious, and might have made you unhappy if I had had my own way. And perhaps I don't do justice to the career you have chosen. I don't know much about the duties of a minister's wife, that's a fact. But it is going to be hard for you, daughter," he continued, with a father's solicitude, "and you will often have to exercise all the heroism you possess. You will have to give up a great deal that you won't see any reason for giving up — that there *is* no reason for giving up, except that one man's meat is another man's poison. But there is one thing I want to say to you, now that the decision is made. Poverty need have no terrors for you, thank God, for you will never suffer for this world's goods as long as I have a dollar in my pocket."

She squeezed his hand affectionately. "I have thought it all over so many times, papa," she exclaimed, with hushed joy. "I am not afraid. I know I shall be happy. I am not giving it *all* up for him, either. Do you know, I had almost made up my mind that I could be a minister's wife, before I had made it up that I could be — Stephen's wife! My life has been so thoughtless and aimless that I felt almost as though I had to strike out and do something for somebody."

"I don't think your life has been aimless," he demurred.

"Coming down here and working seven or eight hours a day, papa, — what does it all amount to?" she asked, .

softly. "I used to think it was something great ; but, papa, dear, I could n't any more think *now* of doing that all my life than —" She paused for a simile not too harsh.

"You never thought of doing it all your life," he objected.

"No, but I did n't know what else I could do. I did n't have any plans. I did n't realize how much I could do — and be — if I only made up my mind to. I did n't realize how much there is to be done."

"What, for instance?" he asked.

For a moment he felt sick at heart. A great loneliness closed down over him, for his chosen disciple, his own flesh and blood, seemed to be rending his choicest doctrines into shreds, and making ready to abandon him for another.

"Just little things that don't seem to amount to much, but which really make up life and the happiness of people. I can't name them over, you dear old doubting Thomas!" she exclaimed, taking his hand in hers. Then, as if reading his bitter thoughts, she ran on, "You are doing good right here in the railroad, by being honest and charitable and intelligent. *You* have n't wasted your life. I don't mean that. I owe all that I am to you — to you and mamma — and I have done good here, too. But you are a man, papa, and I am a woman, and the time has come for me to change and go where I can do even more good."

Darlington was a little sceptical of the amount of good she was going to do, but he was beginning to feel less anxious about her happiness. As a consequence, he gave Mrs. Darlington the news that evening with a judicial fairness. She received his communication with

a complacency that surprised him, and nettled him a little. As a railroad man he had never made a concession in his life without putting all the opposing facts on record; not out of pettishness, but simply that the *cessionnaire* might not fail to realize the full value of the concession. Their consenting to Carol's marriage with a minister was in the nature of a concession, he felt, and he thought that his wife swung over too easily. He said nothing, though, and excused her on the ground that she was a woman, and a deeply religious woman, and that Kaltenborn was a man set apart to the offices of religion.

"It makes me heartsick to think of her going, though," Mrs. Darlington sighed. "Since Bert was taken away she seems to have been so different, and to have tried to take his place. The family seems so dreadfully small now. I don't know what it will be like when she is gone. But we can see her often, and I don't know of a man I would sooner give her to. I believe he'll make her happy, and they are both old enough to know their own minds. I feel, too, that if Bert were here, he would approve of it. He thought so much of Mr. Kaltenborn, especially after—" She could not finish the sentence, and added, in a moment, "I suppose they will always be what you might call poor."

"Not while I've got a dollar," said Darlington, briskly.

Whatever doubts Mrs. Darlington may have had of Kaltenborn's enthusiastically accepting this method of eking out his salary, she prudently said nothing just then. She merely answered, "It seems a pity for him to have to struggle along when his father has so much more than he needs."

"I am going to put a bug in his ear about that," said the president, in his most business-like tone. "There is no sense in his being cut off without a nickel. Kaltenborn can be stubborn when he wants to, and I have an idea it's half his own fault—this trouble between him and his father. If I had a boy that wanted to preach, don't you suppose I'd let him, without turning him out to grass?"

"All fathers are not like you, Charles," she answered, with a simple, unconscious pride that pleased Darlington.

"I suppose Kaltenborn's father *is* a ram-headed old Dutchman," observed Darlington, "but I'll wager any money that the difference between them can be patched up—and I'll quietly make it my business to see that it is. From what Kaltenborn tells me, his father has been after him to let bygones be bygones, and come back and help run the business. I figure it out that the old man is losing his grip, and naturally turns to Kaltenborn. But of course a proposition like that stirs Kaltenborn up. He considers it a reflection on his sincerity. But the chances are that Kaltenborn senior never dreamt of such a construction being put on his letter. All we've got to do is to bring Stephen to see that."

"But will his father ever forgive him as long as he stays in the ministry?" asked the wife, doubtfully. "He'll never give that up, you know."

"I'll wager he'll forgive him," said Darlington, confidently.

Mrs. Darlington was used to her husband's fits of enthusiasm, and she did not attempt to argue with him now. She knew that his enthusiasm was often grounded on fact, and she hoped it might be so in this case.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FIRST BATTLE

No one was more keenly alive to the stir which Carol's engagement made in Ashboro than Carol herself. A few, she was proud to believe, would understand and applaud her devotion; but most people, she had no doubt, would regard her prospective alliance as a romantic sacrifice of herself. Therefore she adopted toward most of her acquaintances, in the matter of her engagement, a lofty and somewhat unapproachable bearing, which, if it did not suppress curiosity and criticism, at least kept it away from her own eyes and ears.

It was *his* friends whom she feared — that is to say, his church-members. Of one little woman in particular, clad in a snuff-colored gown and a dingy little brown bonnet, Carol stood in positive terror. She had never seen this little woman except on the night when she read in the Methodist Church; but the withered, diminutive figure, and the beady little eyes staring up at her with cold, piercing fixity, were unforgettable. Dating from her engagement to Kaltenborn, the memory of these eyes began to haunt Carol. For that little woman had heard Carol denounced from the pulpit; that little woman knew she was rich, and danced, and played cards; that little woman probably believed that the very clothes upon her back were filched from the poor.

What else that little woman believed of her, Carol did not dare try to imagine. Yet she, as Kaltenborn's wife, would have to win that little woman's confidence ; would have to look upon her as a sister in Christ ; would have to extend to her a sisterly hand, and that in such a way that it would not be righteously rejected as a contaminated thing. Carol was more than willing to try ; but it is not surprising that under the contemplation of her future duties her spirit sometimes sank.

Now and then, in these despondent moods, she was sharply assailed by doubts of her usefulness to Kaltenborn, and was rendered utterly miserable by the fear that possibly, after all, she would prove only a millstone around his neck. She bravely kept these fears to herself ; but once, when the reaction was strongest in her, just before the tide turned in her favor, she clasped Kaltenborn around the neck as she kissed him good-night, and pressing her head beseechingly to his bosom, she poured out all her troubles.

To her over-wrought imagination, her confession seemed a most damning thing, not only betraying a momentary weakness, but branding her forever as unfit for the high position to which she aspired ; and she pictured, with a little despairing shudder, the grief and consternation with which Kaltenborn's face must be clouded. But to her unutterable relief, he only turned her face upward, with the grandeur of a god — it seemed to her — and sweetly, reverently kissed her.

"My well-beloved," he said, with tranquil joy, "if ever I saw God smiling on an act of mine, I see Him smiling on this union of ours."

Carol felt then as if she was clinging to a rock from which no storm could sweep her.

In times past, before his engagement, and especially when Kaltenborn felt discouraged, he had occasionally speculated on the feasibility of going somewhere and establishing an independent church — a brotherhood-of-man church, with no creed, and open to all who aspired to a higher life. While not possessed by the idea, and regarding it only as a possibility of the future, the prospect of freedom and independence which such a scheme opened before him had manifest charms for his original disposition. After their engagement, he several times dropped remarks which showed that the idea of an independent church was still stirring in his mind.

Carol now set industriously to work to discourage the project, though in the beginning she had rather favored it. She saw that the whole matter had its roots in Kaltenborn's discontent, and this discontent she hoped, as his wife, to abate, if not entirely remove. Moreover, she had discovered in Kaltenborn a restlessness and love of change which she made it her task — with a perfectly serious and, withal, very beautiful assumption of maternalism — quietly to overcome. Above all, she had a woman's horror of being outside the pale of a system or an established institution. She felt safer and more comfortable behind the bulwarks of the church, even though the discipline there was a little galling.

Another thing which gave her thought was Kaltenborn's half-formed determination of asking the conference which met in the fall to remove him to another charge. In the beginning she had unreservedly favored this idea. She feared that the Ashboro church, for reasons already set forth, would not give her a fair trial ; and she fancied she could assume her new rôle with less embarrassment in a place where the curious eyes of so many of her old

friends were not upon her. There was reason in this, too, as she well knew. But when she came to learn, as she did in time, that the younger element of the Methodist Church was solidly for Kaltenborn's return, her conscience began to trouble her. To leave Ashboro under these circumstances seemed like ignominious flight, not at all worthy of the brave resolutions she had been making. At last she brought the matter before Kaltenborn, though with some reluctance.

"Then you think, do you," he asked, smiling, "that after all these years of plucking out the choicest morsels from the fleshpots, you can make the people of Ashboro believe that you are really coming down to a fare of herbs?"

"They will have to believe it, if I eat at a table where there is nothing but herbs, — won't they?" she asked.

Kaltenborn fell into a thoughtful silence. "Do you really want me to come back here another year?" he asked, finally.

"You must say *us*, now," she corrected, brightly.

"We are not married yet," he said, smiling.

She gave him another affectionate glance. "I fancy we are, dear," she answered, soberly, "if marriages are made in heaven." In answer to his question, she added: "Yes, I want to stay here. That is, if you want to. I would sooner go away, I believe, if I simply followed my inclination, for I feel that it would be easier for me. And yet I feel as though that would be shrinking from the very first blow of the battle I am going to fight. I am deathly afraid of some of your people — some of *our* people, dear," she corrected, softly. "I am afraid of that little old woman in the snuff-colored gown, — you never told me her name. And I'm afraid of your landlady. But I

am not going to run away from them. I am going to march right up, even if my knees shake under me. Stephen, are you laughing at me?"

"With you, girl, not *at* you. You were laughing yourself." He reached over and took her hand thoughtfully. Of late he had fallen into a way of requiring this aid to thought. It was on his tongue to caution her against over-valuation, and to warn her against unnecessary combats; but he could not find it in his heart to say anything that might by any possibility chill her enthusiasm. "You will rout your foes, if we stay, I have no doubt," he answered. "The question is, can I rout mine? I can come back here, if I say the word, it's true. There is some comfort in the thought, too. But can I live if I do? There are three or four old men in this church whom I can never get along with, and they have a small following. Old man Collier, for instance, pays fifty dollars a year to the church. If I come back next year, he says he won't pay a cent."

"Did he say that?" asked Carol, incredulously.

"He did — in the last quarterly conference."

"Right before you?" she asked, with flashing eyes.

"Right before me."

For a moment her cheeks burned with indignation, and her sweet mouth set threateningly. Then she asked, softly, giving his hand an encouraging caress, "What did *you* say, dear?"

Kaltenborn's eyes twinkled humorously as he answered, "I simply said, 'Brethren, that is twenty pieces more of silver than was offered Judas Iscariot.'"

"No, Stephen!" she exclaimed, with true Darlington exultation lighting her face. "Good!"

"No, bad," he corrected, soberly. "A quarterly con-

ference is not exactly a board of directors' meeting," he added, smiling. "The old man hasn't been out to church since. Had I not been quite so handy with my wit, I might have won him over. Then there is old Billy Walters. I think he'd pick heresies in the Sermon on the Mount, if he found it outside the covers of the Bible." He paused, and she laughed keenly. They could say these little things to each other, and expected always to say them. "Altogether, I have thought it best at times to let some other man take the helm here. I don't know, though, whether he could do any better than I have."

"He might not do as well," she suggested, with unquestioning confidence in his ability. "And you have all the young people on your side. They are the real workers in the church, after all. What do you care for a few crotchety old men? They'll soon be dead and gone, anyhow."

"No, I think some of them have set out to break Methuselah's record," he answered, grimly. "Anyhow," he added, "they are not likely to die in time to be of any service to me."

"Well, Stephen, I don't think you ought to step down and out and thus virtually assist them in dictating the policy of the church. They are reactionists, and I think it is your duty to oppose them," she added, stanchly. "If you resign, and they get a man that won't oppose them, it will leave the young people helpless. Dear, you ought not to leave. And I want to stay — now," she added, pleadingly. "I thought at first that I could do better somewhere else, but I believe that is only because that somewhere else is shadowy now. As soon as we got there, and stepped off the train, and everything

looked strange and inhospitable, and we met the stewards and trustees, — or whomever we do meet, — I should be just as nervous as I am now. And *my* friends here won't bother me any. They will drop me, — all except some dear, sweet girls who would n't drop me if I should put on a Salvation Army bonnet and kneel in the streets. And I want the others to drop me. They never did me any good, and — I have you, Steve boy!" she concluded, with a joyous little movement toward him.

"Yes, you have me beyond a doubt," answered Kaltenborn, soberly. After a moment's hesitation he drew a letter from his pocket. "I got this three days ago. I have n't shown it to you because I have been thinking it over. But after what you've said, I can't withhold it longer. It's from a Methodist church in Cincinnati, where I preached three months as a supply before I entered this conference, and it extends to me again the invitation which I refused at that time."

He handed Carol the letter. After she had read it through, she slowly folded it up again with luminous eyes. "This must make you very proud and happy, dear!" she said.

"It does," he answered.

For a moment there was silence. "What answer shall you make?" Carol then asked softly, regarding him with curious, wistful eyes.

"I don't know," he answered, gravely. "I'm on a sea of doubt. Two years ago I refused the invitation because I thought I could do more good in a humbler sphere. This church is fashionable and wealthy, — as different from the Ashboro Methodist Church as anything you can imagine. It seemed to me then that such people had less need of my services than some other people less

favorer." He paused a moment. "I have changed my mind somewhat on that point of late. I have found that a man cannot wholly disregard environment. My ministry here can hardly be called a success. I have done good, I know, but I have also done harm."

"More good than harm, Stephen," said Carol.

"I hope so," answered Kaltenborn. "But what wears on me most here — what makes me think more than anything else that a change would be best for both the people and me and the cause of righteousness — is this eternal stultification of my conscience and my belief which I have to practise here. Extra-orthodoxy binds me here as with bonds of iron. In this charge I am, in a sense, a living lie."

A profound sadness thrilled his voice, and touched the heart of the woman before him. Then, for a moment, visions of that cultivated city church, in which she would so naturally find an honored place, floated before her mind and half-dazzled her. But she dared not speak just then. Too much was trembling in the balance.

"Had you not spoken as you have," continued Kaltenborn, slowly and with a kind of hesitation, "I should feel free to accept this invitation."

Carol opened his coat and slipped the letter back into his pocket. Then she laid her hands upon his shoulders and looked up into his face with the tranquil eyes of love.

"Whither thou goest, my love, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried!"

THE END

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